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THE MISSING LINK.

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I.

WHAT OF IT?

ABOUT ten years ago I was passing through a small city in the State of New York. My errand there was one of business solely, and hence my sojourn was short. I arrived at eight o'clock in the evening and departed at twelve. About half past eleven, as I passed through the main street on my way to the depot I encountered a man with a mask, who, at the moment I met him, was emerging from a store. Just as he stepped out his mask dropped off and I caught a good square glimpse of his face. It would be irrelevant to describe his personal appearance now. But he glared at me fiercely, hastily replaced his mask and made off at a quick pace.

I pursued my way, thinking the event rather strange, but did not give it much attention.

II.

ESTHER CORYDON.

A YEAR ago I came in possession of a manuscript left by a lunatic—a female of rare beauty, it was said, who had just died at the age of twenty-nine. Her life had been a sad one. Deep sorrow in her maidenhood, disappointment in love, and experiences of a terrible nature had unsettled her reason. She was violent at times, at other times silent and sullen, while occasional lucid intervals broke in on her darkened mind. At these times she invariably spent a great deal of time writing, and, although apparently sane, was so inexpressibly sad and weighed down by melancholy that delirium seemed a relief rather than a curse.

This I learned of her attendants and friends. From her manuscript I have collated a story too strange, almost, to be true—a story of wrong and ruin, of grief and injustice, of the irresistible force of circumstances, which sometimes combine in strange and mysterious shapes, plotting destruction to innocent victims.

Miss Corydon's story is too disjointed and incoherent to give bodily; therefore I will narrate the facts as clearly as possible, making only occasional quotations from her manuscript.

III.

THE MURDER.

GEOFFREY ARMSTRONG had been murdered—murdered in the dead of night. In the morning his body was found on the lake shore, disfigured by several ugly gashes, and one deep, cruel stab in the left breast, which had evidently done the work.

The discovery was made about ten o'clock in the forenoon. He had been missed from his usual haunts, his room was found to be empty, and search was instituted. The horrible discovery of his murdered body was the result. It was found by two laboring men, who brought the news with pale faces.

The excitement was intense. Geoffrey Armstrong had many friends in the town, and they wept and vowed revenge. The coroner was summoned, and proceeded with a jury to hold an inquest. Nothing peculiar was discovered, nothing by which a clue could be obtained to find the track of the murderer. Nothing, I say, until one of the jurymen, a physician, closely examined the stab which evidently had been the fatal one.

"This wound," said he, "was not made with an ordinary weapon. It could only have been inflicted with a knife of peculiar shape. Observe," said he. "The cut is flat and thin, and the knife used must have been a long one and a sharp one, for there are no bruises on the body, and nothing to indicate that the knife was inserted to the hilt."

He then inspected the wounds minutely and made accurate and elaborate memoranda.

"In the absence of anything better," he said, "these features of the case may prove of use. For myself, I would advise that every effort be made to *find that knife.*"

The wisdom of the doctor's advice was admitted by all. The knife must be found and the murderer must suffer the penalty of his foul deed.

When Miss Corydon heard the news she was wild with grief, for Geoffrey Armstrong was her accepted suitor, and she dearly loved him. It was with difficulty that she could be prevented from mingling with the crowd of men and boys that gathered around the body as it was carried through the streets.

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She sat in her own room, and her stormy grief after a while subsided into stony calmness.

Esther Corydon was an orphan and was a schoolteacher. Her brother, Philip Corydon, was a lawyer. They were the last representatives of their family, and were the sole sharers of a small estate. They were energetic, high-spirited and affectionate.

Esther was rather above the medium height, had black eyes and dark hair, fair complexion and fine though firmly-moulded features. Her brother was also tall, but his hair was light and his eyes were blue. From them sparkled resolution, courage and a proud and sensitive spirit. The only subject on which he and his sister had ever disagreed was that of her marrying Geoffrey Armstrong. Armstrong was a poor artist, and Esther had confidence that his genius would carry him successfully through life. But Philip, although he cherished no ill feeling against Geoffrey, looked at the matter in a more practical light, and did not regard the match as a suitable one. His opposition was not violent; he simply gave his sister his advice, and hoped she would heed it.

Miss Corydon had another suitor whom she did not love. She had told him so several times in a very unreserved manner, but still he persecuted her with his unwelcome attentions. This suitor's name was John Rivers. People generally called him fine looking, but there was a look about his small, bead-like black eyes which Miss Corydon termed "snaky." But whatever were his bad or good qualities, Miss Corydon preferred Geoffrey Armstrong, and that was enough. At least it should have been enough for Mr. Rivers, whose plain duty it was to let her alone. But he not only did not let her alone, but he nearly pestered the life out of her, and vowed he would marry her yet.

The dead body of Geoffrey Armstrong was conveyed to his late boarding-house, and there respectably laid out. The wounds were dressed as neatly as possible, and preparations for the funeral made.

Meanwhile, the officers were discussing the best mode of detecting the murderer. The clue afforded did not seem to promise much, as the knife had probably been thrown far out into the lake, and in that case there would be no possibility of recovering it.

But who had last been seen with the victim? No one knew. He had left his boarding-house early in the evening and gone, as he said, to the shore of the lake to sketch a moonlight scene. However, one person had been seen searching for him during the evening, stopped at all his usual lounging places and anxiously inquiring his whereabouts. That person was Philip Corydon. His manner was somewhat excited, and he appeared in great haste.

No one thought of accusing him of the crime, as his reputation was unsullied, and to associate him with such an act seemed preposterous.

"But," said John Rivers, who was conversing with the officers, "where is Corydon? I haven't seen him around this morning. You know he was very much opposed to a marriage that was talked of between his sister and Armstrong."

"You don't accuse him of anything, do you?" indignantly demanded a bystander.

"Accuse him? O no. But he's a good sharp lawyer, and we ought to have his advice in this case, it seems to me. Why don't somebody look for him?"

Officers are incredulous beings, and take nothing for granted. One of them had listened silently to Rivers, and was thinking in silence. He finally looked up and said:

"'Twouldn't do no hurt, as I know of, to look for that Corydon. It looks kind o' queer that he shouldn't be 'round, 'specially seein' he was after Armstrong so fast last night. Where's his boarding-house?"

On being informed, he started for it, followed by a parcel of men and boys of the class always on the lookout for a sensation. He soon arrived at his destination, and, accompanied by a brother officer, ascended to Corydon's room. He knocked at the door lustily. No reply. A louder knock failed to elicit any response.

The officers looked at each other significantly. Another knock was given with the same result. Again the officers peered into each other's countenances, and as if by simultaneous agreement they placed their shoulders against the door and burst its fastenings.

What was that on the floor, in the middle of the room? And that in a corner, near a chair?

The one was a long, sharp, thin, flat-bladed knife, covered with blood, and the other was a cap, with red stains and dirt on it!

The officers involuntarily started back, accustomed as they were to scenes of horror. They then scrutinized the room closely, but found nothing else unusual. The weather

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was very warm, and one window was raised, allowing the slight breeze to gently ruffle the light curtains. Without all was bright sunshine; within it was bright, too, but upon what a scene! There lay the traces of a bloody murder, in the room of a man of high standing in the community. He evidently had not retired to rest the night before, as the bed was undisturbed.

The people outside grew impatient at the non-appearance of the officers, and began to be clamorous. Finally one of them appeared at the door.

"Friends," said he, "you'd better go home. We've made an important discovery, which may lead to the finding of the murderer. Philip Corydon was fast after Geoffrey Armstrong last night, and this morning one's dead and the other's not to be found. Besides, we've found something in Corydon's room that leads to horrid suspicions. I'm going down town now, and you'd better do the same, for Bill's guarding the room, and you wont get any satisfaction by standing here."

So saying he started off, but only a few did likewise.

"Who'll help me to find Philip Corydon, the murderer of Geoffrey Armstrong?" he cried.

A loud shout went up and the whole troop followed him. Down the street they went, murmuring and muttering, ever and anon a louder voice than the rest giving utterance to some sentiment that found quick and noisy applause.

Knots of men were at the street corners, and women hastened from one house to another to talk over the terrible affair. Excitement ran high, and before noon every man, woman and child in the city knew of the murder. But Philip Corydon was not to be found.

IV.

MISS CORYDON'S NARRATIVE.

THAT masquerade ball—I never shall forget it. It was the night before the murder. I went dressed as the Queen of Night—a character and costume very becoming to me.

Geoffrey was there, with simply a black mask. He did not wish to be encumbered with a costume, as he was going out late in the evening to sketch a moonlight scene. Philip would not go. Business, he said, kept him away. O, that fatal business! Why did he select that night?

John Rivers (how can I write his name?) was there also. How he did persecute me. His character was that of a black domino, and it concealed all but his mean eyes and his white, claw-like hands. He haunted me all the time, and no one but me recognized him. Occasionally during the evening he would disappear, and at these times I felt a relief.

About eleven o'clock Geoffrey came to me, unmasked, with his book and pencils, and bid me good-by, as he was going to the lake shore to sketch.

Now, thought I, for another siege with John Rivers. But strange to say he did not come near me for more than an hour. I did not see him at all during that time, and I thought he had left the hall, though I was not sure, as I caught a few distant glimpses of a figure resembling his.

Finally he approached me just as the party was breaking up, and offered his services as an escort home. I could do nothing else than accept, as the dancers were rapidly dispersing. To my surprise and satisfaction he did not make love to me on our way home, and we separated with a simple good-night.

I went to bed and slept soundly. But O, what a waking the next morning! Geoffrey murdered, his poor, mangled body and white face being gazed upon by hundreds of curious eyes, and more than all my brother accused of doing the deed.

As the people passed through the streets I heard their shouts and mutterings, and Philip's name was often distinguishable. What are they raving about him? thought I. All of a sudden Mrs. Gambee, my landlady, rushed into my room.

"O Miss Corydon!" she exclaimed, "what do you suppose they are saying about your brother! They have found something terrible in his room, and they think he killed poor Mr. Armstrong—O, Lord a massy, what have I said! Don't look at me so!"

I did not faint, but think I must have fastened my eyes on Mrs. Gambee with a strange expression, for she appeared to be in great terror lest she had done harm by telling me the news so suddenly.

I was nearly stunned. They had found something in his room, had they, that led them to think he had done the murder. These words I repeated to myself a number of times, and finally, without speaking to Mrs. Gambee, or paying her any more attention than if she had not been there, I put

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on my things and started for Philip's residence.

I had a vague idea that some one tried to stop me, but I went on, regardless of any attempted interruption, and walked swiftly through the streets, my face closely veiled. But few recognized me, I believe, and they gave me a wide berth, not caring, probably, to touch the garments of a murderer's sister.

I soon arrived at Philip's boarding-place. A dozen ragged urchins had collected in front of the door, and were discussing the murder with childish wisdom and garrulity. I ascended the steps and knocked tremulously. A man-servant opened the door.

"Is Mr. Corydon in?" I asked.

"No, miss," he answered, grinning.

"Do you know where he is?"

"No, miss, nobody don't know where he is. He keeps himself scarce, now, he does."

"What do you mean? I am his sister. They have not gone so far as to arrest him, have they?"

"O, you're his sister, are you? I'm sorry for that. No, they haven't arrested him, for the reason that they can't find him."

"Cannot find him?" I echoed, "why can they not find him?"

"'Cause, miss, he's run away," replied the waiter.

"I do not believe it," I exclaimed, indignantly. "He did not do the deed. He would not run away. Let me go to his room."

"Right up this way, ma'am. There's an officer there. You'll have to ask him."

I went up stairs. An officer guarded the door of Philip's room and would not let me enter. I begged. He was firm.

"It's my duty, ma'am," said he. "The President of the United States could not go in there now."

I saw it was of no use to plead, and sat down at the head of the stairs to think.

To think! O, what misery there is in thinking. Thought has driven me mad. If I could never think again, what a comfort it would be!

After sitting there for some time I was aroused by a hubbub below. Boys were screaming, there was a sound of wheels approaching, and footsteps rattled on the pave.

"Something is up," said the officer, and he strained his neck to look out the window, but did not desert his post.

The carriage stopped in front of the house, the front door opened and Philip came bounding up the stairs.

"What under the heavens is the matter!" he cried. "What does this crowd mean, and these people following me?"

"O Philip!" I cried, springing to him. "You did not do it, did you?"

"For mercy sake, Esther, you here, too? Do what?"

An officer burst in at the door just then. He advanced to my brother.

"I arrest you, Philip Corydon, for the murder of Geoffrey Armstrong!"

At that moment I fainted, and can remember no more. I was ill for six weeks, most of the time in a raving delirium. But O, what became of my brother? I have preserved a newspaper with an account of his trial, and the report I believe is truthful.

V.

THE TRIAL.

THE trial of Philip Corydon took place speedily. It was very exciting, though not very lengthy, occupying only about three days' time in the court. A summary is given, taken from the newspaper found among Esther's documents.

The counsel for the prosecution presented the following points:

1. Geoffrey Armstrong had been murdered on the night of the 28th of September.

2. Philip Corydon had been seen by several, the evening before, searching for Armstrong. Once he had gone to the lake shore, the place where the body had been found.

3. Corydon had left town late on the night of the murder, and the next morning a knife and a cap had been found in his room stained with blood.

4. It was known that Corydon seriously objected to the contemplated marriage of his sister to Armstrong, and on the evening he was searching for Armstrong his manner betrayed excitement and agitation.

Doctor Brown was called, and testified that the wounds which caused the death of the murdered man could have been inflicted only with a knife corresponding in description exactly with that found in Corydon's room.

Max Strauss, a dealer in toys, masks and curiosities, testified that on the night of the murder, about half past eleven o'clock, he was sitting in his store, when he heard a knock at the door. On opening it a man with a mask entered and inquired for a sword. Witness had no sword, but sold him a long, flat-bladed

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knife, which the man said would do—he wanted it for a character he was going to personate. The knife found in Corydon's room was shown to witness, and he identified it as the one he had sold. He also thought the cap found in Corydon's room was the same one worn by the person who purchased the knife. Witness could not identify the mask worn by this person, as it was of a very common style, similar to twenty or more he had sold during the week.

Such was the substance of the testimony given and the points presented on the side of the prosecution.

The defence submitted the following:

The prisoner was a man of high character in the community, and of known good traits as a citizen. That, although he was opposed to the marriage of his sister to Geoffrey Armstrong, his dislike of the latter did not partake of the character of violent hatred, and was altogether insufficient on which to found an accusation of this kind. The prisoner could not account for the knife and cap being in his room. They must have been placed there by some other party, in order to direct suspicion in the wrong direction.

The prisoner admitted that he had searched for Armstrong the night before the murder, and he wished to see him on private business. But he had left town without seeing him, and the fact that he returned the next day ought to be proof of his innocence.

When asked why he left town so late at night, prisoner replied that his time was precious, and by leaving at that hour he could do his business early in the morning and return by noon, which he did.

His business was connected with Armstrong, and that was the reason he had wished to see him before leaving. Said business was of such a nature that it would be of no avail in the defence, and hence prisoner declined to mention it.

Such was the substance of the points made and elaborated upon by the respective counsel. Able and eloquent speeches were made on both sides, and the judge charged the jury impartially.

The large audience was agitated by conflicting emotions; first, the general esteem in which the prisoner was held; second, the almost overwhelming evidence against him. The verdict was awaited almost breathlessly.

The prisoner was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to hard labor in the State Prison for the term of ten years.

VI.

MISS CORYDON'S NARRATIVE.

When I recovered from my illness my brother was in prison. I looked over the accounts of the trial. "Fools!" thought I. "Why do you say my brother is guilty of manslaughter? He is either guilty of *murder*, or he is *innocent*. If he killed Geoffrey Armstrong, it was a devilish, cold-blooded *murder*. But you doubted it. You knew he could not do such a thing. You wanted to convict somebody, though, and so you declared my poor brother guilty of manslaughter."

But he was innocent. He never did the deed. As soon as I was strong enough I made preparations for a journey. I would go to the prison and see Philip.

With a dreary heart and a mind clouded with trouble, I got my clothes in order and made preparations to go. One evening, when I was sitting in my room despondent and gloomy, a knock was heard at the front door. The servant said a gentleman had called to see me. In a listless manner I gave directions that he might be shown in. John Rivers was ushered into my presence.

I shall never forget my feelings on beholding him. All the dreadful memories of the last sad two months rose up before me, thickly and oppressively. My brain was a heavy lump of lead. But in the midst of all my wretchedness rose the thought, "that man is my enemy!" He stood looking at me, with his small, bright eyes, black and insinuating, in a manner questioning and doubtful. He seemed to wish to read my thoughts. Before, he had been only an acquaintance who had made himself disagreeably intimate—a rejected lover—a disappointed suitor who evidently wished to remain a friend—but now, I could not help it, he seemed like an enemy—an intruder on my rights and a destroyer of my happiness. It was the first time I had seen him since the murder.

"Miss Esther," said he, "I make bold to call on you, for I hope we are friends, as we used to be before the—the great misfortune that has come over us." He spoke in a low tone, with an attempt to be subdued and sympathetic in his manner. The character did not suit him well, for his bright eyes sparkled and snapped as if they would give the lie to his pretensions.

"This is an unexpected honor, Mr. Rivers," I replied, coldly. "Will you take a seat?"

He sat down and rubbed his thin hands.

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"Ah, Miss Esther," he said, "it is daily demonstrated that this world is but a vale of tears. The happiest of us see dark days, and the most confident are often doomed to meet with disappointment."

He spoke with a satisfied air, as if this little speech were a triumph of eloquence that should set him up in my opinion.

"True," was the only response I could make.

"Yes, Miss Esther, human beings who seem perfect often carry sorrow to the hearts of their friends by appearing in their true characters."

I was in no mood for conversation and did not reply.

"But," he continued, "our duty is not to mourn and pine away, we should rather cast aside sorrowful memories, and look about us for new associations, making ourselves and those around us happier."

"Sorrow and disgrace are not easily forgotten, or set aside, Mr. Rivers."

"Ah, but it is a fault of the world's people that they associate the guilt of one with the innocence of another. *You* should not bear the disgrace of your brother's cri—that is to say, his imprisonment."

That was a cruel stab, and he knew it. He would have said "my brother's crime" if he had dared.

"Mr. Rivers," I replied, with dignity, "you should know that such conversation is painful to me. You will certainly do me the kindness to dismiss the subject."

"Certainly, Miss Esther," he replied. "But I wanted to say to you that you must consider me your friend, and call on me for any assistance you may require. If people should turn a cold shoulder to you, why, just remember that John Rivers will always remain a true friend, and rejoice in any opportunity to serve you."

He remained for a while longer, sustaining a conversation almost entirely unaided by me, for I was sick at heart, and longing for him to go. At last he took his departure, bidding me good-night, and protesting his friendship.

Two days after I went to see my brother. I cannot describe our interview. The disgrace had told terribly on him. He never could look the world in the face again, he said. He looked thin and pale, and I thought he was not well. He told me about the business that had called him away that night. It was an affair connected with Geoffrey Armstrong. He wanted to look over certain records by which Geoffrey thought he could prove his claim to some property he had been cheated out of years before. But he found that he would need certain memoranda, and so returned early next day in order to see Geoffrey. But Geoffrey was dead, and no one but he could testify to this.

"I feel that I cannot live ten years in this place," said Philip, at one time during our interview.

I left him with a heart almost deadened, but with a spirit to dare and to do *anything* in order to discover the real murderer and set my brother free.

But what could I, a helpless girl, do? The world believed my brother guilty, and no one would look with encouragement on any efforts I might make to prove him innocent.

However, I made up my mind to secure the services of some able lawyer, and let him watch, in a quiet, unobtrusive manner, for some clue by which to discover the real murderer.

So one evening I went to see Mr. Pinch, a shrewd little man, who saw everything in a minute, when he chose, and who could observe without being observed.

I talked with him an hour, and at the end of that time, I believe, convinced him of Philip's innocence, and had him thoroughly interested in my case.

But we were not to be known to be in communication. If either discovered anything the other was to be informed by letter. So we parted, my heart strangely buoyant. Yet there seemed to be a dead weight within me, dragging me back, and a voice dully whispering that all my labor would in the end come to naught. I had to force this feeling back, and summon all the resolution of my nature to drive away despair. Yes, I had an end in life now, an object to be accomplished, in which my whole being was enlisted.

I used to often walk on the lake shore and wander about on the gravelly beach where the dreadful scene was enacted. Through cold weather and chilly winds I would venture, and watch the waves as they rolled high and seemed to be trying to wash off the stain left by the blood of my Geoffrey. O, poor boy, to be struck and cut till you were dead!

The beach was two or three rods wide, and then the land rose abruptly and was thickly covered with trees and bushes. Among these I would sit, in a measure protected from the wind, and watch and think. I knew not

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what the charm was that drew me there. Sometimes I went to get rid of John Rivers, for he visited me frequently, and I never was glad to see him. But he would come, and he often opened anew the wounds which had been inflicted on my spirit, and which never could scar over. If he had been kind, or considerate, or really the true friend he pretended to be, he would not have done this.

One evening I was sitting in a large rocking-chair, by the fire, feeling tired, ill and drowsy. I was almost asleep, when, by a sudden impulse I rose and wandered down to the shore, and was soon seated among some bushes, looking out upon the water. As I was sitting there musing, I heard a footstep on the gravel, and, looking around, saw John Rivers approaching. My heart gave a leap, for I thought he had come to seek me. But he soon stopped, looked out over the water, and as I became certain that I was not what had brought him there, I gave a subdued sigh of relief.

He had stopped on the exact spot where the murder was committed. After standing for a few moments he looked around in all directions as if to be satisfied that he was alone. He then stepped back and appeared to be looking at some imaginary object. Then he stepped stealthily forward and, looking at a particular spot, made a violent motion as if striking some object. Then springing back he gesticulated wildly, as if fighting with a phantom. Finally he extended his arm with a sudden lunge, and turned and ran about a rod from the spot. Then he covered his face with his hands for a moment, and after a minute or two approached the spot of his singular pantomime and bent over, as if examining some object on the ground. He remained in this position as if transfixed, and I, drawn by a mysterious and irresistible impulse, approached the spot also. He did not hear or see me, yet I stood close by him. Horror of horrors! There lay on the ground, in a dim, phantom-like shape, a human form, covered with bloody wounds. From one deep wound in the breast projected a long knife. I looked at the face; there, upturned and pale, with death-throes agitating the features, was the countenance of Geoffrey Armstrong! At that moment Rivers looked up. His eyes met mine. "*Murderer!*" I cried, "you are not alone!"

Suddenly a new sensation came over me. A bright light was before my eyes, a warm fire beside me, and I was sitting in my chair, waking from a doze into which I had fallen. "O, what a dream!" I exclaimed, and arose just in time to receive Mr. Rivers, whom the servant was ushering into the room.

"Pardon me, Miss Esther," he said, "I thought I heard you scream just as I entered. Are you ill?"

I was agitated, the dream having affected me strongly.

"Good-evening, Mr. Rivers," I said. "Did I scream? I had such a dreadful dream."

"Indeed!" said he; "and may I ask what was its nature?"

"O yes," I replied. "I am so used to horrible thoughts that I am very stoical about such things. The dream was a very singular and a very terrible one, but I will tell it to you, if you wish."

I do not know what spirit came over me, for I was not only willing, but was absolutely itching to tell that dream to John Rivers. I would paint it in glowing colors, and tell it to him with all my eloquence. But I did not mention his name. I told it all but that, and then said:

"It was terrible, Mr. Rivers. Ah, how distinctly the face of that man is pictured to my mind, as he looked up from the phantom body and his eyes met mine. *His face was pale, his eyes small and black, his eyebrows heavy, his mustache jet black and luxuriant, his cheeks rather sunken, with a small brown mole on the upper part of the left one.*"

He sprang from his chair. His cheeks were paler, if possible, than usual; he looked at me steadily for a moment, his eyes darting lightning flashes.

"You have described me!" he said, at length.

"I know it," said I.

After a pause he walked to the door, put his hand on the knob, held it there for a moment irresolutely, and then came back and sat down again.

"Well," said he, "that was a very singular dream."

"Very," I replied, and then continued, bent on torturing him: "They say that when a man commits a murder there is an irresistible fascination which leads him to visit the spot afterwards."

"Good gracious! What do you mean?" he exclaimed, in a violent manner.

"What do *you* mean, Mr. Rivers?" I asked, drawing myself up. "I am not aware that there is any necessity for getting excited."

"O no, certainly not," he said, forcing a

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laugh. "Pardon me if I have offended you."

The conversation lagged after this, as I had no desire to continue it, and he seemed to lose his ready command of fine sounding words and phrases. He soon departed, after making a few commonplace remarks.

The next morning I sent the following note to Mr. Pinch:

"Nov. 20th.

"Watch John Rivers. If you communicate with me, call him Fald. E. C."

During the next four weeks I received two notes from Mr. Pinch. They read as follows:

NO. I.

"Fald frequently walks to the lake shore."

NO. II.

"Fald has a visitor—apparently an intimate friend. They go together on the lake shore. They have rented a private room in a block belonging to me."

I cannot say that I suspected John Rivers of having murdered Geoffrey Armstrong. But that dream made a deep impression on my mind, and I found my thoughts involuntarily wandering in a channel indicated by the above correspondence with Mr. Pinch. I would watch John Rivers, at any rate. Had he not tried to marry me? Was he not in a great rage when I refused him? Now, that Geoffrey was dead, did he not nearly persecute all patience out of me? It was a terrible crime to accuse one of without good foundation. Yet I did not mean to accuse him of it,—I only meant to find out all about him, and know what there was of my dream, if anything.

Mr. Pinch, I thought, would not encourage me in prying into John Rivers's actions, and so, without saying anything to him, I took a careful survey of the premises where Rivers had rented a room, and found out that there were several vacant, unfurnished apartments adjoining each other, and that his room was one of these. I obtained a key that would fit the lock of the one next his, and resolved to play the part of eavesdropper for a few evenings.

What a course was this for a young girl, supposed to be modest and respectable. But who was I? In the eyes of the world I was a murderer's sister, with nothing to lose, and everything to gain in character and standing. I might have abandoned the place and gone to some distant point, where my history was not known, and I could occupy a respectable position in society. But no, I had an object in life, and that was to prove my brother's innocence. Until this was accomplished reputation and standing were nothing to me.

So, evening after evening, about six o'clock, when business men were gone to tea, and I was comparatively secure from observation, I walked down street, and made my way, unknown to a single living soul, to my solitary room in Mr. Pinch's block. Here I would sit, bundled up closely for protection against the cold, and watch through a small aperture in a wall the proceedings of John Rivers and his friend. Most of their time was spent playing cards, and sometimes friends were brought in to join in the games. Once in a while small sums of money changed hands, but never to any great amount.

Sometimes Rivers and his friend would sit down after they were through playing, with a box of cigars between them, and hold lengthy conversations. I then would hear vague allusions, as I thought, to me. The conversation would run as follows:

"Why in the deuce don't you marry her, Rivers?"

"Hang it, man, if a girl *won't* have you, what are you going to do."

"Why, try the arts of skillful persuasion, and overcome her objections, to be sure."

"Yes, but that don't always go down."

There was nothing in this to repay me for my trouble, and I once almost resolved to give up my lonely night-watches.

But just about that time I received word that my brother's health was failing, and this maddened me so that I watched and listened more intently than before. Not that I really expected to accomplish anything, but I took a grim delight in sitting there through the long nights, and thinking how sweet revenge would be if I should discover anything to materially aid me in my undertaking.

So the time went on. Perseverance has its reward, and I was to have mine. One night I heard something that set the blood thrilling through my veins like a shock of electricity.

Rivers and his friend had been playing cards and drinking. Rivers had drank moderately, but his friend grew excited and garrulous. He talked and prated with a singular mixture of good and ill humor.

"O, you miserable fellow," said he, "you ought to marry that girl now. If you don't, you know it wouldn't hardly pay."

"What wouldn't pay? If you mean it wouldn't pay to marry her, you are about

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right, for she's got the devil in her, and besides her fortune is not half what I supposed it was."

"O, is that so? Then I'm sorry I had anything to do with it. By George, it was an ugly job!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Devilish ugly! How did you feel when it was done?"

"When what was done? You talk like a fool."

"Ah, it's very well to talk like that. But we're alone now, what's the difference? I tell you I get so crazy thinking about it that I must talk to somebody, and if it isn't you it will be some one else."

"Well, well, talk then, and get through," said Rivers, in a voice full of impatience and contempt, "but don't you blat to any one else."

"O no. You can trust me for that. But just think of it—"

"I don't want to think of it!"

"Just think of it I say—two innocent men—"

"Shut up, will you!" roared Rivers.

"Don't be so infernal cross to a fellow. But that knife and cap did the work, didn't it? I tell you, you *must* marry her now, after all that."

Rivers was on his feet and had seized a huge stick of wood that lay by the stove. He raised it aloft.

"Another word out of your mouth, and I'll —put you beyond uttering any more!"

His eyes were two living coals and his face was a picture of rage.

"*Don't kill him too!*" I cried, in a warning voice from my place of concealment.

The effect was electrical. The drunken man was sober; the sober man dropped his billet of wood and turned the color of ashes. Both stared at each other with a dazed look.

I waited no longer, but noiselessly left the building and proceeded rapidly home. It was eleven o'clock, and my light was burning low. I entered with a night key, without disturbing any one and wended my way to my own room.

I was in a state of terrible excitement. My brain was all of a whirl, and my thoughts ran wild with each other. O, had I discovered the real murderer? Was my brother to be set free, and again be an honored citizen? I was dizzy and faint with excitement and anticipation. I would see Mr. Pinch to-morrow, and we would push things to the glorious end.

But what a visitation of woe awaited me! It is said that the darkest hour comes just before dawn. It is also true, sometimes, that when hope seems brightest the deepest disappointment is immediately at hand.

On my table, just beside the lamp, lay a telegram directed to me. I hastily opened it and read the following:

"By telegraph from —— Prison to Esther Corydon: Philip Corydon died this afternoon at five o'clock, from a sudden sinking away—the result of a lingering illness."

Darkness seemed to envelop me. A heavy, oppressed feeling took possession of me, which I tried in vain to shake off. At last my desperate struggles found vent in a long, loud scream. I heard a rushing sound, was conscious of a struggle, and forthwith relapsed into consciousness.

When I awoke I was in a small room, lying on a bed. Everything looked strange. No one was in sight, and I slowly looked about me. There was no furniture except a stand, and a chair which seemed to be fastened firmly against the wall. The bedstead was of iron. I looked up at a small window, which was protected without by iron bars. And, what looked stranger than all, the walls of the room were thickly padded all over. I sat up in the bed. I tried to rise, but was bound fast.

Just then a woman entered the room. Seeing me, she gave a start, and immediately ordered me to lie down. I obeyed involuntarily, and asked where I was.

"There now," she said, peremptorily, "be quiet and don't get excited."

I looked at her in wonder. She returned the stare curiously, and, approaching me, said:

"How do you feel?"

"Weak, very weak," I replied; "but tell me where I am, and what these cords are about my limbs for."

She gazed at me for a moment, and then started off with the words:

"I'll go and see the doctor!"

This seemed very strange to me. I felt over the bed, and took up a handkerchief that my hand came in contact with. It was marked in the corner "Esther Corydon." The sight of my name brought everything back to me.

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"O, O!" I cried, as the recollection of those dreadful events rushed upon me. It was more than I could bear, and with a scream I sank back into unconsciousness.

I have now been in —— asylum eight years. I am crazy most of the time, they tell me, but I am not now. I am temporarily sane. These periods come three or four times a year. In them I have written out my life history. It is a terrible tale of wrong. But who would listen to the charges of a maniac? I have tried the doctor several times, but he never will talk with me on the subject.

These days of sanity, which come over me, are almost unbearable. I write to relieve my mind. For I can't help thinking of my sad history, and thought to me is distracting. Memory brings nothing but sorrow with it, and contemplation of the past is misery.

O, how I long for the relief of delirium. Then I may rave, and forget in frenzy all my woes. O welcome, mania! Let me forget myself in your oblivion and drown grief in madness!

VII.

THE MISSING LINK.

I HAVE compiled the preceding story from Miss Corydon's manuscript, because the facts related possess for me a strong interest. This will be understood when I state a fact connected with the incident mentioned in Part I. of this narrative. The features of the man coming out of the store, which were revealed by his mask dropping off, impressed themselves strongly on my memory. *His face was pale, his eyes small and black, his mustache jet black and luxuriant, his cheeks rather sunken, with a small brown mole on the upper part of the left one.*

But the next day I was hundreds of miles away, and still travelling rapidly.

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THE PAINTED CHAMBER: CLARICE LOGAN'S CONFESSION. PART I.
Willian, Camilla
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pg. 21

THE PAINTED CHAMBER:

OR,

CLARICE LOGAN'S CONFESSION.

BY MISS CAMILLA WILLIAN.

PART I.

AMONG all the parks and squares in the good old city of N——, there is none finer than Linden Square. It is in the best part of the city; near enough to the business streets to be central and convenient, yet slightly retired, and in no present danger of becoming itself contaminated by business.

The square takes its name from the double row of lindens which surrounds it—lindens with "rustic benches underneath their over-hanging eaves." In the centre of the green is a fountain, where a marble Neptune sits in a constant shower, when the water commissioners do not deny him that luxury. On three sides of the square, separated from the green by broad streets, are blocks of lofty houses, some old, solid, and built of stone, others of brick, and more elegant, if less imposing. On the fourth side runs one of the great avenues of the city.

In one corner of Linden Square, facing on North street and the avenue, stood a large stone house, known as Bond House. It had been built thirty years before the date of our story, by a wealthy gentleman named Bond. His building had been too great for his means, and after ten years of occupancy, he had been obliged to leave it. Since that time it had been used as a genteel boarding and lodging house. We neglected to say that the three streets which, besides the avenue, surround the square, were named from their situations, North, South, and West streets. Consequently, Bond House had an eastern and southern exposure, and was full of sunshine at all hours of day.

One bright day in early October, a lady and gentleman rang the bell at Bond House, and desired to be shown a suite of vacant rooms.

"It is a corner suite, and the finest in the house," the landlady said, conducting them up the wide stairs.

The suite consisted of two rooms, both large-sized, and the corner room, a sunny parlor, finished in the most elegant modern style. From this, one door opened back into the bedroom, and another door led into a short corridor, which in turn communicated with the hall, it being considered an advantage to be so far separated from the other rooms. The whole of Bond House had been refitted about five years before; but the bedroom of this suite, of which the finishing had been very costly and beautiful, as well as well-preserved, had not been changed from the time of the building of the house. A wainscoting of oak, carved in fine fluting, extended up three feet on the wall, and the doors were of oak, handsomely panelled. Above the wainscot, the walls and ceiling were painted in fresco, the ceiling representing a canopy of blue cloth, the walls a trellis covered with vines, in which were bright-plumaged birds. The effect was delicately gay, and was carried out in the furniture of the room, which, though of oak, was light in pattern, and upholstered with bright blue. Voluminous curtains of blue damask swathed the two long windows, through which the sun was shining brightly on the morning of which we speak.

"What a delightful room!" cried Mrs. Lang, when they entered the chamber. "And how odd, too! It looks like a place with a story to tell. Is there a story, Mrs. White?" to the landlady.

"I dare say that there are a great many," the landlady answered, hesitatingly. "Probably every tenant has a story. This is the 'Painted Chamber,' and is the only one in the house which is unaltered from the first."

"We must have it right away," Mrs. Lang said, to her husband. "I am delighted to get into a place that isn't all lath and plaster. It's the only romantic-looking room I ever saw in my life. I don't doubt that it has a ghost. It must have a ghost."

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The gentleman looked smilingly on his sprightly young wife, and after a few questions, engaged the rooms.

That very evening they took possession of their new quarters, and immediately proceeded to make themselves at home. A cage of canaries, two or three plants in blossom, and a score or so of vases and other porcelain finery was added to the establishment; the presses were filled with Mrs. Lang's wedding outfit; drawers and boxes were crowded with all sorts of pretty trifles; the writing-desk and work-table subsided into their places, and the apartment got to wear a home look.

"Now that is what I call comfortable," the little lady said, as she sat down one evening, about a week after they had taken possession, and contemplated the finished work. "Nothing can be nicer. Are you contented, Frank?"

"Perfectly contented," the gentleman replied, with great heartiness.

"O, I don't mean with me," she said, giving his arm an affectionate squeeze. "That's of course. I'm all right. I mean with the rooms."

"I am contented with you and with the rooms," the young husband answered.

"You don't half know how nicely I've arranged everything while you've been away. Come and see. Here, in this closet, are all your clothes. This is all yours. If you find a rag of mine in it, you may throw it out the window. Here are your boots, and here are your slippers; and your linen is in these drawers, and your old papers here, and your love-letters there, and when you get older, there's the place for your hair-dye. O! here's your umbrella. Now isn't that nice? Everything will know its place so well after a while, that I shall expect them to walk into it without assistance. Now come here. Your dressing-case is on this side of the bureau, and mine on the left. Here's my perfume-case, if ever you want any, and here's my pearl-powder and liquid rouge—"

"Stop your fibs," interrupted the husband; for these last-named articles had no existence, save in the little bride's nonsensical speech. Nature had given Bessie Lang a fine complexion, as well as a chattering tongue, and other and better gifts also. She had an honest, affectionate and courageous heart; she was generous and persevering; and under her simple manner lay hidden a considerable fund of discretion and good sense.

So much for Mrs. Bessie. I am inclined to think that we care less about her husband. He was like a hundred other young men—a little better than ordinary, maybe—good-looking, with passable business talents, moral, and fond of his wife. He had inherited part of a very good business—his father having been a publisher—and he had already an income of four thousand a year. To be sure, fifty dollars for board for himself and wife was rather high on that income; but Bessie had been used to living stylishly, and his business was improving.

"So that we can dwell in peace under our own vine and fig-tree," said Mrs. Bessie. "That geranium will answer for the fig-tree, and the vines are all over our bedroom walls. I feel really patriarchal, don't you?"

"I have no doubt that I shall, after a time," said Mr. Lang, with great gravity.

While Mrs. Lang was congratulating herself and her husband on the pleasantness of their situation, on the opposite corner of the square, facing on South street and the avenue, the lady of the house was just coming down stairs, dressed for dinner. A very dainty and elegant lady she was, and rather young to be the mistress of such an establishment. But Judge Lawson thought that no one could preside over a household with more graceful dignity than could his daughter Dora; and though he had been a widower so many years that Dora had no recollection of her mother, he seemed as far as ever from marrying again.

Miss Dora stepped lightly down the tufted stairs, long folds of rich lavender silk trailing behind her. The cherry velvet trimmings cast a faint color on her somewhat pallid and delicate face, and the band of cherry velvet on her chestnut hair made its deep hue glow yet more richly. Miss Dora was but medium height, but her slenderness gave her the appearance of being tall, and her proud and erect carriage increased that effect. There was something even a little chilly in her air, if you saw her with averted eyes and smileless lips; but once catch the brilliant lustre of those hazel eyes, and see the small cherry mouth tremble with a smile, and you realize that the girl is of southern birth and blood.

Judge Lawson was of southern family, and lived in Georgia till the death of his wife. That event quite disturbed his life. The home that had been hers could be his home no more. The scenes which she had witnessed he could no more behold. Even the skies that had arched over her beautiful head seemed to send lightning on him for sunshine. After a year of aimless wandering, he took his only

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child and moved to the northern city of N——. At the time of his removal he was a rising lawyer, and, the first shock of his bereavement over, he threw himself with renewed ardor into his profession. Honors which he scarcely cared for poured upon him, and at the age of fifty, he was one of the judges of the supreme court, one of the highest legal authorities of the country, and wealthy beyond his wish. He might have had political honors, but he scorned them.

"I will not take offices which have been soiled by such occupants," he said, loftily, to the offer of a nomination to a high place.

All this time we have left Miss Dora on the stairs. She had just reached the foot, when the parlor door opened, and a gentleman stood within it. He was tall and slight, with brilliant black eyes, and hair perfectly white. There was something in the pale and delicate features strikingly like the young lady's, but the face was worn, and the eye was keen, rather than sparkling.

"Well, papa, how do I look?" asked Miss Dora, after kissing her father.

He drew her into the parlor, and gravely turned her about before him. "I should say that you are well-dressed," he pronounced, after a deliberate survey.

"Now let me look at you," she said, quite satisfied with this dictum. For the smile of fond pride on her father's lips warmed the cool words as they passed, and there was no finer flattery than that in his lingering eyes.

"I suppose that I must walk round you," she said, making a slow, sweeping circle about him, as he stood with folded arms, and in a slightly theatrical attitude. "I think that you will do very well, Judge Lawson."

"Have you got through, my dear?" he asked. "My neck is stiff. That is the way Kean used to stand in Hamlet. Now, have you looked any to the dinner?"

"Yes, papa; and I do think that Smith is a jewel. I will never have Brown again. Everything is perfect, from the soup to the creams. Do you remember the last time we had Brown, when the Conrados were here from Cuba, and his sending in a scorched gravy with the turkey, and the peaches with the down rubbed off, and shining like apples? I shall never forget. The gravy mortified me, but the peaches set me into such a fit of laughter that I didn't get over it for the evening."

"Yes, Dora," her father said. "And the senora thought that you were laughing at her. It is nearly time for them to come,"—taking out his watch.

As he spoke, a carriage stopped at the door, and a distinguished-looking gentleman in a naval uniform descended, stepping with care, and limping slightly. But he was not too lame to lift his hat and show his thick, snow-white hair, and give a smiling bow when he saw the girl looking at him from the parlor window.

Judge Lawson was too much accustomed to receiving company, and that of the highest rank, to think himself obliged to remain stiffly in his parlor, ignoring the arrival of his visitor till he had been announced. The ready servant opened the door, as the old hero limped up the steps, and the host stood on the threshold with a graceful and hearty welcome.

"I'm so glad to see you, admiral," said Dora, coming to the parlor door. "How does your foot get along?"

"In a limping way," he laughed. "But it is really mending. No, thank you, I don't patronize dressing-rooms. I can do all the prinking I want to at the glass here. I have no hope of captivating Dora, and I don't care for any one else."

The admiral's prinking consisted in one hand-sweep, that set his thick hair standing up from his forehead. Then he turned to meet the smiling face of his young hostess.

"Now you look properly fierce," she said, clasping his large white hand in her slender ones, and leading him to a seat.

"Now, who have you got for company to-day?" he asked. "I came early on purpose to be prepared."

"In the first place, you!" said Dora.

"Excellent!"

"In the second place, Ex-Governor Manners and his wife," continued the young lady, counting them on her fingers.

"Very good!"

"Thirdly, Mr. O'Mahony."

"So you invite me to dinner with a Fenian!" the admiral said, smiling, but reddening a little also. "Perhaps we are to arrange how I shall be careful not to see his fleet sail out to invade a friendly country. The papers will have it so, at least."

"We invited Mr. O'Mahony as a gentleman, and not as a politician, admiral," Dora replied, with spirit. "And I scarcely think that any respectable paper will comment on my father's inviting a few friends to dinner. I didn't know that you feared public opinion so, sir."

"Anger becomes you, my dear," the old

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officer said, smiling. "Always get angry if you want to be irresistible. Now, who else?"

"The author of 'Ways and Means,'" the young lady replied, still a little stiffly. "And Mr. and Mrs. Olive Rodman. Here they are, now." And she rose to welcome her guests.

When they had all come, the admiral perceived that there was one who had not been mentioned to him. This was an elegant, suave gentleman of thirty-five or thereabouts. He entered quietly, bowed to his host and hostess without speaking, rather with the manner of one of the family, and then leaned on the mantel-piece, glancing carelessly about, and pulling the long, dark moustache that drooped over his handsome, scornful mouth. He had a pale, intellectual face, and rather fine gray eyes, and there was something graceful, though slightly supercilious, in his whole air.

The admiral had hardly time to observe him, for, on the entrance of Mr. O'Mahony, he felt himself obliged to seek an immediate introduction, in order to propitiate his young hostess.

The Fenian leader bent his tall form gracefully, and gave the old officer a searching glance out of his smouldering blue eyes.

"I am happy to see you, sir," the admiral said, with emphasis. "And I hope that there will never be any longer blade between us than a dinner-knife. But, by Jove! if I find you taking Fenian troops out of any of our harbors, I'll sink you if I can! My hand on it!" And half-laughing, and wholly in earnest, the old man offered his hand.

The other took it in his soft, firm clasp. "And if you try that," he answered, "I will aim higher than your last opponent did;" glancing at the admiral's lame foot.

"Now, admiral, I hope that you have no more fear of the papers," whispered Dora, maliciously, after this compact was ratified. "Of course this hostile agreement will be published everywhere."

"O! you women have a right to be as impudent as you please," the gentleman said, good-humoredly. "By the by, who is that romantic-looking person leaning on the chimney-piece, and looking so forlorn, with no one to speak to him?"

"O! he?" said Dora Lawson, quickly, and with a heightened color. "People are waiting for him to speak to them. That gentleman is Mr. Lewis Cary, who has papa's law-office. May I bring him to see you?"

"What else is he going to have of papa's?" asked the admiral, pointedly.

Miss Dora reddened vividly, hesitated a moment, then, leaning on the old soldier's arm, whispered, "papa's daughter!"

"Go and bring him to me this instant!" said the admiral.

After all, what a stupid affair a ceremonious dinner is! It may be very well for a party of English tipplers to sit and joke or doze over their wine; but for men to whom eating and drinking is not a business, and who have something to say worth attending to with quiet jaws, it is a poor way of spending three hours. However, if it is true that whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well, it may be stated, as matter for congratulation, that Smith, the caterer, outdid himself on this occasion. Everything was done to a turn, and came in at the right time and in the right way; the gravies and sauces were delicious; the peaches came in with cheeks pink and velvety; and Mr. O'Mahony, who had been in France long enough to know what champagne is, complimented the wines.

At nine o'clock the company left the table, and before ten, all had gone but Mr. Lewis Cary, who lingered with his liege lady. He also went after a few minutes, having a business engagement to fulfil, and Dora was left with her father.

They sat in silence for a time; for the excitement and anxiety which always, in a slight degree at least, attends the entertaining of company which the entertainers fear may not always prove quite congenial to each other, had produced weariness. Judge Lawson adjusted his glasses, and gravely looked over the evening paper.

His gravity had been no wise cheered by the sound of the murmured conversation between his daughter and her lover. Indeed, the judge was anything but pleased with the engagement, though he could hardly have told why. Mr. Cary was a young man of good position and reputation, and he could actually bring no objection against him except that he (the judge) did not fancy him, an objection which was altogether too flimsy to be stated. He had delayed his consent, and urged his daughter to do nothing hastily; but the lover's steady persistence and Dora's passionate pouting had made him yield at last, though unwillingly. He sat now and wondered what Dora could find to love in a man who seemed to him habitually cold and mocking in manner, and critical and sarcastic in speech. But the girl could have told of looks of such living sweetness as no woman's heart could resist, she

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thought, and of a pathos and sadness that could wring tears from her against her will.

"Papa," said Dora, rousing herself from a reverie, "I want you to make a call with me to-morrow evening. Will you?"

"Yes, Dora? On whom?"

"On a school friend of mine, Bessie Canton. She is married to Frank Lang, of 'Lang and Franklin,' publishers, and they are boarding at Bond House. I haven't seen Bessie since two years ago, when she and her mother were just starting for Europe."

"I will go if nothing prevents," the judge said, rising. "I must say good-night now, dear. I am tired."

"Good-night, papa! I hope you will sleep well," said Dora, rising to take the embrace he offered.

This was her invariable good-night wish, and Judge Lawson would have had little hope of quiet rest if her gentle wish had been omitted.

"Don't sit up long, dear," he said, turning at the door, then with a smile went away.

"Did you ring, Miss Dora?" asked a servant at the door. John was sleepy, and wanted to go to bed, and took this manner of indicating it.

"No, John. But you needn't wait. See that all is right, and I will turn off the gas when I am ready to go up stairs. You can turn it off in the hall now, and leave a lamp on the table."

When she was alone, Dora turned the chandelier lights down to a dim twilight, then began slowly walking through the long rooms, to and fro, to and fro, her footfalls soundless, but her rich robe rustling about her with a ghostly sound. At first her reverie was pleasant, some little flush of pleasure still lingering from her lover's good-night glance and word. But presently shadows gathered and deepened. She knew that her father was not pleased with the engagement, and that his consent had been given only because he could give no reason for withholding it, and not from his heart. She might call him unreasonable in his prejudice; she might entertain and express the hope that it would wear away; but down in the bottom of her heart, under all her love, and pride, and satisfaction, lurked a hidden something which troubled her. She felt as though Lewis Cary had fascinated her; and, though she would not own it clearly to herself, she sometimes felt that the true sweetness of love was wanting. They had been engaged for four months, long enough to have got over the first excitement of novelty; but that feeling of rest which should accompany an assured and confident affection had not come. She had a feverish, nervous feeling about him, and, unexceptionable as his reputation and position were, she yet shrank from hearing him spoken of, as though she might hear something to his disadvantage.

As she walked now, she strove to analyze her own emotions. Clearly, this feeling must be banished; and, once finding the root of it, that might be done. Might not her uneasiness proceed from the fact that Lewis Cary was always peculiar in his manner? As on that day when he had taken his position aside at first, instead of mingling with the company. True, he had been all that she could desire when she had won him to the others, and she had felt proud of him, and pleased with him. But his first oddity had made him conspicuous. Then he never talked quietly with her of the future, but seemed to dwell in the present, ignoring everything else. It is true that his ardor was flattering, but it was not reassuring. Dora drew a long sigh, knit her delicate brows, and murmured:

"He said once that he never liked to dwell on anything in which he may be disappointed; and that since he may lose me by death, or any unforeseen change, he would rather think only that he has me now, and not build on any future, only taking things as they come. Now I love to think that as long as I live, I am sure of his love."

The tears gushed out as she spoke, and she sighed again, with some unspoken yearning, some unacknowledged misgiving.

"Then," she resumed, "he certainly has fascinating ways. I suppose that he can't help them. It was with those that he first attracted me. And he seems to prefer to hold me by them, rather than by a firm and tender trust. I believe I would rather, sometimes, when we are together, that he should almost forget me, than to remember me so scrupulously. It is as though he feared that if he should for an instant remove his eyes from me, or forget that low and thrilling tone, I should become indifferent to him. Ah, me! If he could be convinced that those things are but the guinea's stamp, and the man himself the gold that I love!"

She walked for some little time, drooping and sad, then roused herself with a laugh.

"Silly girl that I am!" she thought, "to torment myself with such vain shadows. I really shall deserve actual trials, if I weep

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over such ghosts of trials. Poor, dear Lewis! How I scold him for not neglecting me, and growing commonplace! I'll to bed."

For an instant the light flared up, casting its radiance on gilding, and marble, and drapery, and picture; then the superb rooms were in darkness. A rustling form swept out into the wide, silent hall, a white hand took the lamp burning there, and Dora Lawson glided up the stairs, the light strong on her beautiful face, and making a golden circle around her, the shadows gathering, dancing, and closing behind her.

There was *something* strange and weird in that moving picture in the silent midnight. It reminded one of old tragedies, where a lady with a lamp glides through her palace, silent at midnight. As the light cast its changes on that face, it took different expressions. Now it was pale and determined, and one almost looked to see a dagger in that slender clasp. Now it was wan and sad—she is going to look her last, unseen, on some dear, dead face. Now it is timid and fearful—she goes to meet her lover, who perils his life to come to her. Then the door of her chamber closed on Dora Lawson, and with a sigh she sank into sleep a few minutes after.

One scene more, and the principal *dramatis personæ* of our story will have been presented. Three gentlemen stand talking together on the steps of a house in F—— street, London. The house is a very stylish one, brave with stone and marble, balconies and pillars; but it is not every gentleman who would care to be seen lingering long or often on its steps; for, in spite of the pretence of *cafe*, reading-room and music, this establishment was well known to be one of the most desperate of gaming-houses.

With only one of these gentlemen have we aught to do. Mr. Clifford Norton was the eldest of the three, and a very distinguished though a very dissipated-looking person. He was probably fifty-five years of age, large and noble in figure, with a handsome face, whose bold, brilliant gray eyes and finely-curved mouth struck the observer at once. His was one of those constitutions which will bear a great deal of abuse; and though there might be at times a slight appearance of bloating, there was no sign of breaking up, or of age.

The three stood carelessly talking, and drawing an occasional whiff from their cigars, glancing under bonnets of passing damsels, and commenting on the faces seen there. Suddenly Mr. Norton turned toward the house, with his back to the street, his face growing deadly pale.

"What is the matter, Norton?" asked one of his companions, in surprise.

Mr. Norton put his hand on his breast, and held it there for a moment, shivering and silent. Then he spoke, in a changed voice:

"I've got a little touch of heart-complaint, I believe. That was an ugly leap. I must go into the house again, I believe."

He went as he spoke, without looking at his companions—one of whom followed him—and, calling for brandy to be sent him, hastily entered a small private room that faced the street.

"Can I do anything for you, Norton?" his friend asked.

The other started violently, and turned, glancing with startled eyes towards the door.

"O! is that you, Summers?" he said. "I didn't know that you came in. No, thank you! I believe I shall feel better after a glass of cognac. Yes, on the whole, you may order a close carriage, if you please. I may as well get home and rest. I didn't sleep a wink last night."

The young man went to do his friend's bidding, and the waiter brought the brandy. As soon as they were both gone, and the door closed, Mr. Norton approached the window, and screening himself behind the curtain, looked eagerly up and down the street.

"Curse her!" he muttered, under his breath.

There was a knock at the door. He started, reddoned fiercely, and seemed to hesitate whether to grant admittance. But when the knock came again, he put a rein on his emotion, and called out, "Come in!"

"Your carriage is ready," young Summers said, putting his head in. "Shall I wait?"

The gentleman had looked greatly relieved at seeing who his visitor was, and when he saw the real kindness and solicitude in the young man's face, his own softened. "You may wait, if you please," he said, "I feel better, and will go in a moment. Did I frighten you?"

"My father died instantly of heart-disease," said Summers, gravely; "and it gives me a start to see any one else have an attack."

Mr. Clifford Norton swallowed three glasses of brandy, went to the window a moment to look out, then loitered carelessly out with his friend, and down the steps again. A close carriage stood by the curbstone, and hastily crossing the pavement, looking neither to right

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nor to left, Mr. Norton stepped into it, and ordered the driver to take him to Willow Place.

As they drove through the crowded streets, the gentleman kept looking from the window, keeping his face concealed. There seemed to be nothing in view to alarm him. When he reached the little place where he had lodgings, he took another survey before leaving the carriage, then went up the steps hastily, and let himself into the house.

"Has any one inquired for me?" he asked of the landlady, whom he met in the entry.

"No sir; but here's a letter that came this morning," she said, giving him a rough-looking note, on which the superscription ran in a rambling way, all down hill from the first letter.

His eyes had leaped up as he took the note, but when he saw the writing, his face cleared a little. With a nod to his landlady, he entered his room, and after closing and locking the door, sat down and opened the note. The inside was as eccentric as the outside, and ran as follows:

"DEAR NORTON:—A woman came to me last night, saying that she had seen me riding with you, and asked for your address. If she had been young and pretty, I should have given it at once. But she was forty at the least, and as ugly as a witch. So I reflected, pretending not to recollect the number. I made up my mind that you did not want to see this person. She looked like one of the injured females who follow and haunt some naughty fellows like you. So, after a minute's recollection, I found the number, and sent her to Crescent Court. She thanked me, and departed.

"Now, never say that I am not your friend, and never hesitate to go and do likewise for me, if any ghost of my early sins should rise to pursue me, and come to you to know the track. Ever yours,

"CATLIN."

The reader groaned faintly in reading, and after carefully burning the note, began to pace the room, his face wearing a fierce, hunted expression. Presently he rang his bell.

"If any one asks for me," he said, to his landlady, when she appeared, "tell them that I have gone down to Liverpool, and will be back to-morrow night."

"Yes sir," said the woman, who was used to lie for her lodgers for a consideration. The consideration in this case was a bright guinea, which Mr. Norton slipped into her hand as he spoke.

The door closed, and he was alone again.

"She is bold! She is bold! curse her!" he muttered. "Does she think that I am a man to bear this? Does she dream that I'm going to have her dogging me up and down the earth? Curse her!"

There was an intense hate in his voice and expression as he spoke, and he clenched his hands, and wrung them together.

Presently he sat down, and began to think out some plan of action. He must leave London. Once knowing that he was in the city, she would have him if he remained. There was nothing for it but flight, and that a speedy one. He might feel safe on the continent, unless she should enlist the police in the pursuit. In that case, he would be lost. There was no escaping a French detective. His thoughts gave a turn here. Had he not better stay and try to pacify her again, rather than fly and exasperate her, perhaps, to revenge? But the thought was discarded as soon as entertained.

"I couldn't trust myself with her," he said, in a deep whisper, with an ugly look in his set jaws. "I'm afraid my hands would give her throat a grip in spite of myself. I'll make the best escape I can. I'd rather go to Egypt than see her!"

He thought a few minutes longer, then started up, and began making some preparations for travelling. Mr. Clifford Norton always kept himself in light marching order, and in ten minutes a valise was packed, and the few papers in his room burned. Some articles of clothing he glanced at, tossed over, and muttered that his landlady could have them for the clothes-dealer; but he carefully put up a case of pistols and a small sword. A beautiful silver-inlaid rifle hung over the mantel-piece, and he glanced at that longingly for an instant.

"I'll give that to Catlin," he muttered; and sitting down, wrote a hasty note to his friend, to post on the way.

"Go and get the rifle," he wrote, "to remind you of the lie you told for me. If there's anything else in the room that you want, take it. You might like the little print after Deuchar. If not, tell the landlady that I left it expressly for her. Tell everybody that I've gone to America."

He sealed and superscribed the note, and as he stood up, there came a knock at his

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door. Every sound seemed to startle him—every summons to be a terrible one. As before, he hesitated to answer, but collected himself, and gave a careless call of admittance. It was his landlady.

"There is a woman to see you, sir," she said, in a whisper. "I told her what you said, but she wants to rest a little while. I told her that she might sit by the grate and warm her feet, for the evening is getting chilly, and I thought that I'd just step in and tell you, sir. I didn't know as you'd mind seeing a woman."

In the course of her life of fifty years, the landlady had received a good many glances which were not seraphic; but she was astounded and alarmed at the fierceness of the eyes that blazed out on her as he spoke.

"I do mind seeing a woman!" he hissed, in a suppressed whisper. "I'd rather see the devil than a woman. If you let her in here, by heaven!—"

He stopped short; for there, in the open door before him, and just behind the landlady, stood a small, sallow woman, with rather weak-looking light blue eyes, and a disagreeable smile curling her thin lips, and showing a set of defective, discolored teeth.

"I knew that you'd see me, Mr. Norton," she said, coming in with the air of one sure of a welcome.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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THE PAINTED CHAMBER:--OR,--CLARICE LOGAN'S CONFESSION.: PART II.
Willian, Camilla
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pg. 105

THE PAINTED CHAMBER:

—OR,—

CLARICE LOGAN'S CONFESSION.

BY MISS CAMILLA WILLIAN.

PART II.

IF looks could annihilate, then Mr. Clifford Norton's visitor would have been consumed to ashes on the spot. For all his fear, and horror, and loathing were concentrated into one passion that gleamed in his eyes, and whitened his face; and that passion was hate.

But the woman seemed quite unharmed, as well as unabashed, and merely looked at him and smiled—a smile that might well have exasperated a far better man. Such a leer of mean triumph, of mocking, of threatening, of malice! Such a look is bad enough from one who cannot harm; but when that one has power the effect is maddening—or calming. If the victim have sufficient self-control, he assumes the calm of desperation.

Mr. Norton had self-control, and there was no help for him but in exercising it. He was fairly, or unfairly cornered. So, unclenching his teeth with some effort, he made a profound bow, and answered his visitor's greeting:

"How, indeed, could I refuse to see you?" he said, with bitter irony. "I could never have dreamed of refusing had I guessed who was honoring me with a call. You are welcome!"

He extended his hand and took her half-shrinking one, giving it such a grip that she cried out with pain and anger, "I'd rather not be welcomed in that style, sir!"

"You need not trouble yourself to wait, madam," Mr. Norton said, to the staring landlady. "I will have the honor of entertaining this lady."

The landlady colored, tossed her head, and flung out of the room, banging the door behind her.

When the two were alone, the gentleman's politeness did not abate. He gave his visitor a chair, bowing lowly again, placed a screen before the fire, and prayed her to be seated.

The pale eyes of the stranger blazed with rage. He was taking the role out of her hands, and getting a sort of advantage over her in appearance, if not in reality. That mocking politeness was the sharpest weapon in her armory, and it made her wild to see it in the hands of another.

She looked at him vindictively, and shaking a warning hand in his face, muttered, "You'd better not provoke me, Clifford Norton! I tell you, you'd better not provoke me!"

His mocking smile died on the instant, and he sank into, rather than sat down in, a chair. She became cheerful immediately, and her thin mouth resumed its leer.

"Going on a journey, weren't you?" she said, agreeably, nodding toward the valise. "I am sorry to interrupt your packing. Were you going to Paris, now?"

He made no answer, but sat with a hand on each arm of his chair, and his eyes fixed on the fire. He seemed to be holding himself down, lest he should spring at and end this creature at once.

"You have lost your gallantry since I used to know you in Georgia," she went on, with a voice softened and fined to its utmost. "I used to think that when you were paying court to Mrs.—"

"Woman!" he exclaimed, starting forward in his chair, and looking at her with such a face that she faltered, "you told me not to provoke you. Did it ever occur to you that you might not be quite safe in provoking me? You have made me desperate!"

"You don't dare to touch me!" she said, defiantly, but shrinking.

"Don't presume too far, that is all!" he replied, relapsing into his seat again, and returning to his study of the fire.

She looked at him a moment with a keen and apprehensive gaze. Then the recollection of the power she had reassured her.

"You dare not touch me!" she repeated, nodding her head with bitter emphasis. "I

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am not alone in London. If I am not in the house within two hours, I shall be searched for, and they will come here. If I am not found, there are papers which they will read, and which tell the whole story—the whole story, Clifford Norton!" shaking her finger close in his face.

He looked at her with a faint mocking coming into his face, for in those few minutes of study a plan of escape had formed itself in his mind.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what you want," he said, calmly.

Her eyes opened a little wider with surprise at his coolness; then she gave a laugh. "I want money, like everybody else."

"Like me," he said, tranquilly, heaving a little philosophical sigh, and folding his hands softly together. "I want money, you want money, he wants money. Plural. We want money, you want money—"

"But I will have it!" she interrupted, sharply. "I need it, and will have it."

"I sincerely hope that you may get it," he responded, raising his eyebrows. "But I have actually none. You can see by the humble place I live in, that I am none too rich."

"You dress well enough!" she sneered, glancing over his simple and elegant toilet. "Your broadcloth is of the finest, your boots as dainty as they ever were, your linen is plaited by a first-class laundress, I should say, and you have diamonds in your bosom and sleeve-buttons, and a diamond on your fingers."

"Paste, my dear, paste!" said the gentleman, smiling indulgently. "You are not learned in gems."

"I don't believe it!" she retorted. "I am not learned in gems, it is true; but I know the way a diamond burns. And I know, too, that you are not the man to wear an imitation. Besides, I saw you driving out a horse that must have cost somewhere among the thousands. As to your being here, perhaps you thought that a quiet little place like this would be good to hide in."

"And so you want money?" he asked, seeming scarcely to attend to her talk about his expenses. "Have you made up your mind how much to ask for?"

"I want a hundred pounds to-night," she said, shortly.

"O, tut! Where am I to get a hundred pounds to-night?" the gentleman replied.

"You can borrow it of some of your fine friends," was the answer.

"Will that sum content you for the present?" he asked.

"For the present, yes. But I want some sure provision made for my future. I am growing old, and I have neither home, nor money, nor friends. I wander about the earth like an outcast. Nobody cares for me, or would shed a tear if I starved—"

The woman's voice had been faltering during the last of her talking, and here she stopped short, and burst into a passion of bitter, hopeless weeping.

"I might weep for you," said the gentleman, mockingly, glad to see her suffer who had caused such suffering to him.

She turned her wretched, drenched face on him. "Clifford Norton, has your heart one spark of humanity in it? If it had, you might pity me. I have tormented you; but my necessities and your own crimes drove me to it. I was made for better things; but I am a lost woman. And you are responsible!"

"How am I responsible?" he asked, wonderingly, but with no spark of pity.

"I will tell you how," she said, speaking rapidly. "You remember when you came to Savannah, and found me, a poor Northern relation, in the family of—"

"No names!" he interrupted quickly. "No names. It isn't safe."

"Well, you know where you found me. I was bitter then with the slights that I had to endure, but I wasn't wicked. I didn't know what crime was, and I never dreamed of what I was to become. You came, a handsome, captivating man. You wanted to please the beautiful lady of the house, and to enjoy her society. The most effectual way was to pretend to have taken a fancy to her tenth cousin. I was trusting and lovely. I fell into the net. I believed that you loved me, though you never spoke it plainly. But your actions spoke as loudly as words could, and you insinuated all that I could wish to hear. It was long before I found out that you were seeking the wife of another under the semblance of love to me. At first I was frightened at such depravity, and I threatened to denounce you. You soothed me, and coaxed me, and—well, I was crazy with my bitter disappointment, and all the world of right and wrong clashed together. You made me believe that it was no sin for my cousin to love you, or, rather, you made me feel that I could deny you no help. Of course I hated her. The event proved that I hated her. I was willing to please you at any cost, and to ruin her at the same time. I

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gave you the help that you asked, and you know the rest. Is it nothing that you made the best love of my heart the instrument of my ruin? Is it nothing that you drove me so wild with despair that I lost myself utterly and forever? May the perdition of my soul rest on your soul!" she cried, wildly, starting up. "I dare not think of, or hope for, anything but hell! I shudder at the prospect of death! I have nothing but to eat, and drink, and sleep, and forget as well as I can in drink and laudanum. I would kill myself, if I did not think that hell is likely to be as bad as earth. It can't be much worse!"

"Hush! hush!" Mr. Norton said, softly, laying his hand soothingly on her arm. "Sit down now and talk reasonably. I didn't mean to provoke you, but you drove me to it. You can be so infernally cutting when you try. I do pity you, by heaven! I do! But there's no need of letting the other people in the house hear."

The touch of his hand and his softened voice acted like a 'charm. Her passion died away in long, subsiding sobs, and she sank back into her chair, covering her face with her hands.

"Now, about this money," he began. "Couldn't you take any less?"

She shuddered with a sort of disgust, and looked at him with her face growing hard again. "I had forgotten the money for a moment," she said, with a sort of scorn. "But I wont take any less. And I want it now. I want to get out of the sight of you!"

He made a little courteous bow to this compliment, then drew paper and pens toward him and began to write. The note was rather longer than seemed necessary to ask the loan of even such a sum as a hundred pounds; but Mr. Norton might have felt obliged to make some explanation of his need.

When he had finished and sealed the letter, he went to the door and spoke to a servant in the entry.

"Take this to the same place where you went for me last night," he said, "and give the letter to Mr. Catlin. Here's a half crown, and you shall have another if you go and come back with speed. Tell him to make no delay."

"All right, sir!" the lad said. And in a second after they heard the outer door shut after him, and his fleet steps running up the street.

It was quite dark now, and Mr. Norton brightened the fire and lighted the gas before resuming his seat. He also brought out a bottle of wine, and offered his visitor a glass, but she refused it coldly. He did not take any.

"I have written to a friend of mine for the money," he said. "And I hope that he may have it by him. If he has not, you'll have to wait till to-morrow."

"I'll take your set of paste jewels," she said, sneeringly. "Of course they aren't worth much, but they might bring something."

His alarmed look told clearly the value of the gems, though he tried to laugh as he replied, "I should never consent to wrong you so. I should borrow my landlady's silver spoons and forks first."

They sat for some time without speaking, the woman dogged and stolid, the man listening sharply, but covertly.

After about half an hour, they heard the boy running down the street and up the steps. He let himself in with a latch-key, and came to Mr. Norton's door.

"The gentleman says that he will send right round, sir," he said. "He hadn't just the money in his pocket, but will borrow it."

"Very well," the gentleman replied, quietly. "Here's your half crown. You're a jewel of a messenger."

He resumed his seat again, and that uncomfortable silence fell for a time.

"I got a note to-day from a man whom you have been questioning," said Mr. Norton, at length. "He had got some clue before, and your questions increased his suspicions. He is an enemy of mine, and would do me an injury if he could. I was going away to-night to get out of his clutches. If, by means of this enforced delay, I am brought into trouble, I will denounce you as an accomplice."

She stared at him, her face changing. "They could not know!" she whispered, eagerly. "How could any one know?"

"From your blabbing, woman's tongue," he said, with bitter coldness. "From those papers, which anybody can read if you are not home on the hour. From the manner in which you come here to-night, betraying me to the landlady."

The woman cowered, and repeated, "They could not know. I was careful to say nothing to excite suspicion when I asked for you. The worst thing I did was to-night, and I was angry at your trying to cheat me when I knew that you were at home."

"How about the papers?" he asked, in the same tone.

"O, there's no danger from them," she re-

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plied, confidently. She did not care to tell him that she had lied in order to intimidate him, and that no line of her writing or word of her speaking would ever betray him.

"What did this man say?" she asked, tremulously, after a little pause, her breath coming hurriedly, her eyes anxious.

"O, no matter. It isn't very pleasant to remember," answered her companion, coldly, but full of concealed exultation. He had frightened her at last, he thought, and now he saw his way clear. His selfish soul was utterly incapable of comprehending the remnant of love and generosity which still lingered in hers. Instead of fearing for herself, she had no thought whatever for herself; all was for him; all a terror lest in some way unknown to herself she had fulfilled her own threat of exposure. It was one thing to hold the rod over him, to know that she could make the man who had scorned her tremble, and quite another to see him in actual danger, which she could not avert.

"I don't believe that I have done you any harm, Clifford," she said, faintly. "God knows I would not if I could help it. I have been wild, but I never meant half I said. I would swear that the story is false, to save you."

He made no reply, only sat as though in a gloomy reverie; but in reality, scarce able to conceal his inward laughter, perceiving in her pitiful woman's sorrow and tenderness, only the craven fear of injury to herself, and the hope to flatter him into sparing her.

While they sat thus, there was a sound of a carriage stopping in front of the house. Clifford Norton started up, and seemed looking about for a chance to escape. Then steps came to the door, and the bell was loudly rung.

Clifford Norton turned an accusing face on the pale woman before him. "You hear!" he said, fiercely. The next moment the door of the room opened, and three men entered, constables, evidently.

The woman ran to throw herself on her knees before the man whom she thought she had injured, catching at the hand which he drew rudely from her.

"Shut the door," said one of the officers, drawing a paper from his pocket, and glancing to where the landlady and the messenger-boy stood in the hall, staring at the tableau.

The door was shut; then the officer addressed himself to Mr. Clifford, who had sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands. "Shall I read your accusation before arresting you, sir?" he asked, solemnly.

For a moment there was no reply, and the other two officers glanced significantly at each other, then coughed behind their hands.

"Sir!" began the legal spokesman, with an access of dignity.

"I know what you are here for. I submit," gasped the accused man, without raising his head. "Let us get out of this at once. Don't have a crowd about. Take me to jail at once."

"But what have you done?" cried the woman, finding voice, and lifting her deathly face to the strangers. "He is innocent, gentlemen. I can swear to his innocence!"

"Of course!" laughed one of the officers. "I suppose that you are innocent, too, as innocent as a sucking dove. Now the fact is, madam, that you have got to go along, too. You were accessory to this awful crime."

She staggered back, and covered her face for a moment.

"Come, my fine fellow; we've got a carriage at the door to take you on an airing," said one of the men, jocosely touching Mr. Norton on the shoulder. "Circumstances admit of no delay. We're due at a certain hour, like the Bristol train."

The prisoner shrank away from his captor. "Don't touch me!" he said, shivering.

The three men laughed. "Dainty bird!" said the one who had touched him, taking hold of his arm now. "Come along."

The woman started forward and flung herself on her knees before the officer. "O, spare him!" she cried, passionately. "I am guilty—I alone! He did nothing. I was jealous—"

"Curse you! Hold your tongue!" cried Clifford Norton, for the first time uncovering his face, and making as though he would strike her.

In an agony at the thought of harming where she would have helped, she shrunk into silence, only looking at him with a face of passionate appeal.

"Come, come! no more talk!" said one of the men. "Come along, madam! Are those your traps, sir? You had better take them. You may make quite a visit."

They went out together, each of the prisoners guarded by an officer, the third bringing down Mr. Norton's baggage. Two men got inside, and the third jumped on to the box with the driver. They drove and drove, the poor woman inside wildly looking for some chance of escape for the man who sat opposite her with his face bowed into his hands. It seemed that they had been driving an hour,

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when the carriage was almost stopped by some impediment in the street. At the same instant, Clifford Norton made a spring at the door, and before they were aware, had opened it and leaped out. They started after him with oaths and exclamations, and a hasty pulling out of concealed revolvers; and before the woman had time to collect her thoughts, she was alone in the carriage.

A dart of hope ran through her like fire. He might escape. And with it came another thought. Could she allow herself to go to prison, where she would remain in ignorance of his fate? It took but a breath to resolve and act. She stepped from the carriage, where no one seemed guarding her, and ran as for her life.

It was in the country, and there were trees, and only scattered houses, as she sped along, the road seeming to swim under her feet as she ran, her heart panting wildly, only one thought keeping her from going headlong. He might escape!

As soon as she had left the carriage, the driver turned the horses' heads, and drove gently back toward the city. After a few minutes he drew rein, and three men, who were standing together at the side of the road, got into the carriage. They were laughing heartily.

"By heaven! Catlin," Clifford Norton said, "that was well done! You'd better go into the legal line at once."

"Hang me if I know how the fellows do their business!" said the man called Catlin. "I never saw an arrest in my life. I must learn how it is done, in case I might want to hoax a sharper one than that nymph seems to be. But what on earth ailed you to laugh so? To be sure, she thought that it was hysterics. But it looked too much like what it was."

"I was laughing at your solemn airs. Besides, I saw Summers's evening dress under his cloak."

"I pity that woman," said Summers, a little gravely. "She's got good in her. Did you see how she wanted to take all the fault of your scrapes to herself? Poor thing! I hope that she'll come to no harm."

"O, you're soft!" said Mr. Norton, impatiently. "I know more about that woman than you do. She'll take no blame that doesn't belong to her, nor half that does."

"Now, I tell you, Norton, you owe us a good treat for this. And you owe us the whole story."

"The treat you shall have right away," was the prompt answer. "The story I'll think about. A man of my age doesn't like to tell boys his youthful indiscretions. It isn't good for them."

Meantime, the woman had run on and on, growing faint and dizzy, and at length fell headlong, all her senses deserting her.

She might have lain there fifteen minutes, and was just beginning to moan faintly back to life again, when a couple, a lady and gentleman, came along, approaching a pretty cottage that stood in a little garden at the roadside. They started and stopped as this figure rose to its knees before them in the moonlight.

"What is it, George?" whispered the lady, clinging to her brother's arm. "It must be a drunken woman."

"Let me see," he answered. "What is the matter?" he asked aloud.

The poor woman struggled up to her feet. "I am sick, sir. I fainted and fell here I don't know how long ago. I have no home, nor any place to go. Cannot you give me a night's lodging? I can pay for it."

They hesitated, asked several questions, and finally consented, bidding her follow them into the cottage near. Taking her into the bright little kitchen, where a neat servant-girl sat before the fire sewing, they examined her, and repeated their questions.

She would make but little explanation. She had come from America to see a friend who was in trouble, she said, and she had missed him. She thought that he had left the country.

But she was so plainly ill and wretched that the kind couple took pity on her. A cup of hot tea was brought, and she was persuaded to drink it; and when she had been assisted to a clean and comfortable bed by the servant-girl, the lady herself brought her a tumbler of mulled wine.

"You will sleep better for it," she said, kindly, watching her drink it. "Now, if you are ill in the night and want help, knock on the floor with this cane, and Jenny will hear you. Good-night."

Overcome with fatigue and illness, and soothed by the wine she had drunk, the poor fugitive soon dropped asleep, in spite of her anxieties.

The brother and sister sat in their pretty parlor and talked over the incident.

"Jane Farrel," said the lady, repeating the name that the stranger had given. "It sounds

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English. Poor thing! How miserable such a lot must be, George! For a woman to wander alone, and friendless, and in grief, about the world, and drop at last at somebody's gate, at the mercy of anybody who should find her. Better be under the sod. O! death is not the worst affliction!"

She lifted her sweet and solemn eyes, full of tears, to her brother's face. His own grew dim, and he sighed deeply as he met her glance; then both sat silent and thoughtful.

George Frazer was a designer, whose business was in London, and who, four years before, had brought his bride to this little cottage. There had been three happy years; then his wife died, leaving his heart desolate. His sister Ellen, who had been living out as governess in a nobleman's family, left them on the death of her sister-in-law, and went to live with her brother, to cheer him as she could, and to be a mother to his little girl.

Jane Farrel, as the woman had called herself, slept well for a few hours, but woke at the first peep of dawn. The first sensation of waking was a sickening dread. Something dreadful was pending. Rousing, the recollection of her arrest broke sharply on her. Was she in prison? She started up in bed, opening her eyes with a frightened stare. She saw a small bedroom, over whose one window a flaunting scarlet vine was visible outside the snow-white muslin curtain. A delicate paper of blue and white stripe covered the walls, and a small-patterned carpet of the same colors was on the floor. A few pieces of simple furniture, and the bed on which she lay, were all the rest. Everything clean, fresh and pure, everything breathing of quiet and content. Herself was the only discordant object there. She sank back on to her pillow with a moan of utter self-loathing and despair, feeling that her presence soiled the place, and would soil whatever place she should dwell in. Wherever there were flowers, she was the canker worm. If only she could die and done with it. She would never be better prepared, never prepared at all, she thought.

She turned her cheek to the pillow, feeling so faint and weary, and waited to see if death would come. Somehow, she felt as though it would, as though some great change were to come over her.

A great change did come over her, for she fell presently into a sweet and restful sleep, for the first time in many a long year. And it is likely that a greater change yet was ordained for her by One who saw that she had suffered and sinned enough, and who, out of the depth of her own self-hatred, stooped to raise her to his love.

When she opened her eyes again, a pretty, blue-robed form was standing by her bed.

"Are you feeling better this morning?" asked Ellen Frazer, in a bright, sweet voice.

"Yes, thank you. I am ashamed to have troubled you so much," stammered her visitor, blushing painfully at the sight of that pure face.

"O, you did not trouble us at all. I am so glad we happened to come along just as we did. Now don't get up till you have a mind. Lie all day if you are tired, or ill. I will bring you some tea and toast, and you can rest as long as you like."

"O no! I must go," said the woman, starting up nervously. "I am not fit to stay in the house with one like you. I will not take any breakfast here. Thank you, but I will go right away."

"I shall not let you go now," said the young woman, with gentle firmness. "You are not well, and need care. Perhaps you need assistance which we may be able to give you. 'For the rest, any one for whom Christ died is fit to stay in the house with me. I am not a Pharisee, Jane Farrel, and if my Saviour forgave the Magdalen, so can I."

"I am not a Magdalen!" said the poor woman, with a momentary flash of dreary pride. "My dear young lady, that sin has been spared me."

Ellen Frazer blushed, and uttered a quick "forgive me! If you wish to get up now," she added, "dress, and come down the stairs just outside the door. I shall be in the sitting-room and see you. Here is water, and all that you want."

She glided out, tripped lightly down the stairs, and while Jane Farrel dressed, she heard that sweet voice in merry play with a child.

The recollection that there was one depth of iniquity to which she had not fallen gave the poor creature a little strength and courage. She dressed herself with care, and smoothed out her thin hair, in whose darkness threads of white were beginning to come. Her dress was black, and did not indicate poverty or carelessness, and when she was ready to go down stairs she looked like a lady, whose estate is fallen indeed, but not forgotten.

As she set her foot on the last step into the lower hall, she saw a pleasant picture through the open door opposite. A cheerful little sit-

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ting-room, with the sun shining in on a crimson carpet, and a tiny fire of coal in the grate; and in all that glow a lovely child of three years old playing with a kitten, and rolling over with it on the carpet. Standing and smiling down on them, dropping a word now and then, or touching them playfully with the toe of her small slipper, was Ellen Frazer.

"O! you're down," she said, looking up at sight of the woman, who timidly approached the door. "Come right in. Take this chair; it is the easiest. Now I'll have your breakfast brought in immediately. Rose, wont you come and see the lady?"

The child came shyly, a fair-haired, plump little thing, and stood at the stranger's knee, with her eyes downcast. There was silence for a moment, for the woman was more shy than the infant. But a sudden thought seemed to strike the little Rose, when she had waited as long as she thought advisable for the conversation to be opened.

"See my kitty!" she said, lifting her round blue eyes to the pale and embarrassed face above her.

"O, what a lovely kitty!" said Jane Farrel; and the ice once broken, they immediately proceeded to get acquainted.

In a few minutes Miss Frazer came in from the kitchen, followed by the servant-girl, who carried breakfast on a waiter, and placed it on a stand at the stranger's elbow.

"You are so good!" whispered Jane Farrel, with tremulous lips, as her young hostess poured the tea for her.

"It is easy to do what I do, and costs me nothing," said the girl, smiling. "Indeed, it is such a pleasure that I am afraid I may do it from self-indulgence. The real good is what is hard to do."

"Ah! good is good, whether it be hard or easy!" sighed her visitor.

Jane Farrel stayed with her new protectors that day, "to rest" the young lady insisted. Then the next day she was persuaded to remain a few days longer, and assist in some sewing for little Rose. And so a week passed, and another, and this peaceful home began to take such hold on her that she dreaded the thought of leaving it.

But that one anxiety would never rest. Where was Clifford Norton? Had he escaped? She had eagerly searched the papers every day, and had not seen a word about him, or even any notice of the transaction in which she herself had been engaged. The anxiety grew dreadful as the days wore away. She had confidence enough in the man's boldness and dexterity to think that he might make his escape then; but what was to become of him in the end? She felt that she desired never to see him again, but the thought of him hunted up and down the earth was too painful. She felt that she must go out and see what had become of him, and share his peril, if he were in peril, as she had shared his sin. She told her hostess that she must go.

"You know your own business best," Ellen Frazer said. "But I am sorry to have you go. George and I feel that you are just the person we need to live with us. I have so little experience in household matters; and, besides, I am very often lonely. When Rose was sick last month I was terrified to death. But if you must go, we will not detain you."

The struggle was hard in that lonely and broken heart. Here was a pure and peaceful asylum offered her. Here she might learn what hope is, and wash away her sins, and even gain virtue. It was a temptation.

But she felt that she must first satisfy her own heart—then must tell her friends her whole story, and let them choose freely and understandingly.

"I would gladly accept your offer of a home, if I could," she said, with quivering lip. "And it may be that I could come back some time, if you still should think that I can be useful. But there is one subject on which I must be satisfied before I can have peace. I must find the one whom I came to England to see. Then I will come back and tell you my whole story, and if you will still take me, you will be doing the work of angels. I feel that here, and no where else, can I save my soul. I have no other refuge but the grave."

"Go, then," said the girl, with tears in her eyes; "and come again when you can. Never fear nor hesitate to come, even after a long time. My brother owns this cottage, and as long as we both live we shall be here. He has lost the only one he could ever love, and I know that he will never marry again. I, too, had a hope once; but it withered, and I look forward to and desire no other home than this. I shall rear up dear little Rose in the place of a child of my own. When your work is done come back to us, and we will welcome you. You know that the obligation will be mutual, for you can be a great help to me."

So with many tears the wanderer went forth again, giving no account of herself, only promising to write if she were ill or in need. The

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brother and sister went to the gate with her, and at parting they gave her a warm hand-clasp.

She went away without being able to say a word; but turning after a little while, and seeing them still standing there, with little Rose peeping out between them, she lifted her hands and called down a blessing on them.

And that was the first time that Jane Farrel had ever blessed anybody in her life.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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THE PAINTED CHAMBER:--OR,--CLARICE LOGAN'S CONFESSION.: PART III.
Willian, Camilla
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THE PAINTED CHAMBER:

—OR,—

CLARICE LOGAN'S CONFESSION.

BY MISS CAMILLA WILLIAN.

PART III.

MRS. BESSIE LANG had been in Bond House three months, and was well settled there. All her old friends had been to see her, and she had made some new ones. Everybody congratulated her on the possession of such splendid apartments, and everybody took for granted that she would stay in Bond House till she should go to housekeeping.

Some of her friends observed that of late her replies to these congratulations were less cordial than formerly. Perhaps the subject was an old story. Her landlady noticed, too, that Mrs. Lang was very curious to know all she could learn about the former occupants of the rooms, and once she found the little lady out in the corridor with a cane, which she was knocking on the outside of the wall of her room, sounding in various places.

"I believe that this wall is getting rickety," she said, desisting immediately on being observed. "Or have you rats in the house, Mrs. White?"

"I am not much troubled with rats," the landlady said, hesitatingly. "But there are some. Do you hear them in the wall?"

"Yes; it is either rats, or else the wall is getting some way loose. I think that the panels crack sometimes, and we feel draughts," replied Mrs. Lang.

Mrs. White frowned slightly, more with anxiety than with anger, it seemed, and after waiting a minute, and seeing that the lady had no more to say to her, she went away without any further remark.

Mrs. Lang went into her room, leaving the door open after her. "I want to hear Frank when he comes," she said, and sat down by a window to look out.

It was later than he usually came, and was growing dark. The lamplighter outside lighted the street lamps, and lights began to shine, here and there, from windows.

"Why doesn't he come?" said the young wife, pettishly. "I don't see the need of his staying out so late."

As she spoke, some one stood behind her, she thought. It was evidently her husband, who had come up unheard, and was going to cheat her, standing unseen till she should turn. Her heart beat joyfully, but she determined not to gratify him. She still looked out the window, but with her head slightly turned, so that she had a side glimpse of a line of black, probably his coat-sleeve. He stood so long, that after a while she got out of patience, and moved slowly to one side, to see better, or that the movement might induce him to speak. The shadow moved with her, leaving only that outline visible, and as she moved, a low, long sigh was breathed close to her.

"Why, Frank!" she exclaimed, turning quickly.

There was no person there! She felt her face grow hot with the rush of blood to her head, and springing up, she began searching the room.

"You need not try to hide," she said, lighting the gas, and turning it up to the utmost. Then, having searched the parlor, she lighted the inner room, and searched that also thoroughly. There was no person to be seen.

"Some one came in and ran out again," she said, and going to the window again, saw her husband coming up the street. She ran out and met him on the landing. "I do wish that you could get home earlier, Frank!" she said, as they went into their room.

"I wish I could, too," he answered. "I would if it were possible, Bessie. But just now I am very busy, and shall not be able to leave the office any day for a month before five o'clock. To-night I was a little later, for I stopped to get tickets for the theatre. Do you want to go?"

"Yes, of course! There's the dinner-bell."

The dining-room of Bond House had a gay

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appearance. The house was partly filled with lodgers, professional gentlemen, or men not always in town, who took their meals elsewhere; and there were but twenty regular boarders. These were all acquainted with each other, and were mostly gay young people. They used to go to places of amusement in large parties, that were known and noticed as the Bond House parties, and that usually attracted a good deal of attention to themselves. The ladies wore the latest styles, and were sometimes a little too extravagant in their following of fashion, affecting, indeed, a slight eccentricity, and dropping any cut, or material, or arrangement, as soon as it had been adopted elsewhere. They had great pride in the house, and in each other, and stood together against all outward assaults. They were, moreover, very particular who came to the house, and the landlady would no more have dared to admit a stranger without first consulting her lady boarders, than she would have dared to refuse them soup at dinner.

When Mr. and Mrs. Lang went into the dining-room, most of the people were in their seats, and a chorus of gay greetings met their appearance.

"Come here and sit by me," said Mrs. Col. Margrave, a middle-aged lady, with a profusion of light flaxen curls under her coquettish cap of point lace. "I have been driving people away from these chairs ever since I came in, and keeping them for you."

The young couple immediately took possession of the reserved chairs. Nobody at Bond House had any special place at table, but each sat where he or she liked, next the person to whom they wished to speak at that time. So that Mrs. Margrave's calling Bessie Lang to her side showed that she had something to communicate to her.

"Now, Mr. Lang, you just attend to your next neighbor, and don't hear one word that Bessie and I are going to say. She will tell you afterwards, of course, but I wont let you hear me. It is awful scandal, so shut your ears."

Mr. Lang immediately proceeded to devote himself to his next neighbor, as per order, and was soon in an interesting discussion on the rival merits of certain opera queens, who had been designing to allow the citizens of N—— to hear them sing, and see them sweep their robes about, paying enormously for the same.

"Bessie Lang," began Mrs. Margrave, in a whisper, as she unfolded her napkin, "I've brought home two items of news to-day. In the first place, Valenciennes is going out, and Limerick laces are the only wear, unless you wear Honiton like carved ivory. I'm so glad I didn't buy that cape. After all, I don't like Valenciennes, with its everlasting little cottony patterns. Now for the second piece of information. It concerns you, my dear."

"Me?" repeated Bessie Lang, in some affright. She had a horror of being talked about, and would have suffered a great deal sooner than give food for gossip.

"Yes, you!" repeated the lady, complacently. "Perhaps you don't know it yet, though it's a wonder if you don't. I am delighted!"

Taking two or three sips of her soup, Mrs. Margrave waited to be questioned.

"Now, Mrs. Margrave, you know that I am in torment!" Mrs. Lang said, in a plaintive whisper. "Do let that horrible soup alone; it has onion in it."

"O, I can fumigate," said the lady, with the greatest coolness. "But I will relieve your anxiety. Now, my dear child,"—looking confidentially at Bessie—"you must not be frightened at what I tell you. I dare say that it is all nonsense. Now promise me that you will not be frightened."

"O, good gracious! I will promise anything!" cried Mrs. Lang, in an agony of impatience.

"Well, dear, now tell me if you ever noticed anything queer in those rooms of yours?"

Mrs. Lang grew very red in the face, and stammered out, "What do you mean?"

"Why, they have the name of being haunted," in a whisper. "It has been kept quiet, partly for Mrs. White's sake, partly for the name of the house, and partly because the people who have seen and heard these strange things don't want to be laughed at. I often wondered what made Sidney Meyers and his wife go out in such haste. It seems that they bore these supernatural doings as long as they could. They almost fell out about it, because Mrs. Meyers's mother is a spiritualist, you know, and Sidney insisted that she caused the disturbance by some trick or other. But that is all nonsense, for Mrs. Lumly is a lady, though a spiritualist. Then the Thanes went out, and Mrs. Thane was out of health and nervous for a long time after. Mrs. Bruce told me the whole story this afternoon. She says that the rooms are never occupied long by the same persons, but have five tenants where the other rooms have one, though they are the finest apartments in the house. She

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says that usually a tenant hears nothing for a month; then the doings begin, gradually at first, but growing bolder, till there is no bearing them. They have all been watching to hear about you, and are perfectly astonished that you have had no trouble yet."

Mrs. Lang's impulse was to out with the whole story; but she bit her tongue, and only said, "It is odd, to be sure. But it is very likely that some spiritualist is at the bottom of the affair — some spiritualist or joker. Ghosts are gone by, you know."

"Besides this, Mrs. Bruce told me that things were visible from the outside. You know her sister, Mrs. Miller, lives just opposite your eastern window, across the avenue. The first that she ever saw was a good many years ago, ten years, or more. She says that her chamber-girl told her that she guessed one of the lady boarders across at Bond House was in trouble, for that she and the cook had seen her several times walking past the window, wringing her hands and weeping. For a time Mrs. Miller paid no attention, and told the girls to mind their own business, and not be staring in at people's windows. But one day she sat at the window, looking into the avenue, and happening to glance at the windows of the painted chamber, she saw a light flare up in it suddenly—it was just growing twilight—and there was a lady rushing across the room, with her arms thrown up as though she were wild, and her hair streaming over her shoulders. Mrs. Miller says that her impression was that the room had caught fire, and the woman had rushed in, half-dressed, to rescue a child from the bed. But she had hardly started to her feet, before the light went out suddenly, as though the gas were shut off, and it was perfect darkness. She was so alarmed that she went over in the evening to call on a friend who was boarding here, and asked in a roundabout way about the people, and if anything had happened. She learned that nothing had happened, in the way of accident or alarm, and that the suite of rooms where she had seen the light was unoccupied and locked up. She said that she had seen every article of furniture in the room when that light flared up, and even noticed the painting on the walls."

"I suppose some one went in there and lighted the gas," Mrs. Lang said.

"So Mrs. Miller thought," Mrs. Margrave persisted. "But she has seen and heard so much since that she believes that something is wrong with the room. Since you have been in the room she has seen that same woman walking to and fro, and wringing her hands. And people in the street have seen her. If she were not so unlike you, they would begin to say that Frank ill-uses you. Mrs. Miller knows the face, she has seen it so many times. She says that the lady is tall and elegant in shape, with a perfect torrent of black hair hanging down her back, far below the waist. She says that she is beautiful, but looks like a tragedy-queen, has large black eyes, which she sometimes rolls up, beautiful features, a little dusky, but clear Spanish-hued, and fine black brows and lashes. She says that as this lady walks she wrings her hands, and talks to herself, apparently, in a violent manner, seeming to rave. Sometimes she will approach the window, and look up at the sky; and she always ends by rushing towards the bed and disappearing. This is almost always in the painted chamber; but sometimes she appears in the parlor. But she is always quieter there, and glides about like a lady in company."

Mrs. Lang had grown slightly pale at the latter part of this recital, and her voice was not quite steady when she spoke:

"If there is anything in this, and if these singular appearances are in my windows, I must, of course, search it out. It is a trick, of course, and is scandalous. Some person who lives in the house and knows its ways must be doing this to amuse themselves. It is impertinent for any person to go into my rooms when I am out. I shall certainly watch."

"But," the gossip said, "Mrs. Miller has seen you at one window and this lady at the other at the same time; and once she saw her stand behind your chair and look over your shoulder, when you were looking out for your husband."

Bessie put down her fork, and became very pale.

"But you promised me that you wouldn't be frightened," remonstrated her friend, in an anxious whisper.

"I am not frightened; I am angry!" Mrs. Lang said, recovering herself. "It is an impudent hoax, and I shall expose it. But please don't say anything about it, Mrs. Margrave. We will watch, and catch the joker. If we say anything it will put him on his guard."

"Of course!" Mrs. Margrave assented, recollecting her cold dinner.

Mrs. Lang made a mere feint of eating, and, from being pale, her cheeks grew to have such crimson roses that the company remarked them.

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"That's right! You've got good blood!" whispered Mrs. Margrave, approvingly, as they rose from the table. "I do like to see a person who can face danger, though I am afraid of my shadow. Now, if such stories had been told me about my rooms, I wouldn't have stepped over the threshold again."

"Please don't let Frank, any more than any one else, know anything about it just yet," Bessie said. "He is so skeptical he would be sure to laugh at me, and he might play us some trick as a punishment. You and I will see what we can find out."

The lady nodded, and the company all went across the hall to the large drawing-room, where they always gathered after dinner.

A few minutes' chat, then they separated, to go on their several ways for the evening, leaving only a dull whist quartette in possession of the room. A small party, among whom were our friends the Langs, went to the theatre. There was Mrs. Howard, a painted dowager, magnificent in lace hood and Cashmere shawl, her niece, Annette Howard, a fair waxen maiden, dressed in blue, looking like a pearl in blue enamel, and her nephew, James Howard, much like his sister Annette, and a very handsome young escort. There was Tom Calvert, a dashing young hussar, and there were the Langs, Bessie bright and sparkling in her gray dress and pink Alpine mantle. Not by any means a contemptible party, particularly when they went in late, and rustled down to their seats in the orchestra chairs before a crowded house. Of course it just suited them. It was pleasant to know that more glasses were levelled at them than directed toward the stage. It was pleasant for Bessie Lang to know that gentlemen would inquire who that "pretty girl in the pink mantle" was. It was pleasant for Miss Annette to hear afterwards that some one who had just returned from Europe pronounced her "aristocratic-looking;" and it was simply delightful for Mrs. Howard to know that she could appear out in five different India shawls, and that all her lady friends were aware of that fact, and would any one of them have been glad to tear her eyes out when she swept majestically past them, dropping the rich folds from her ample shoulders.

I am not presenting my characters in very heroic colors, the reader perceives. Unfortunately, the heroic element does not yet overflow the sordid. These people are mere ordinary fashionable folks, neither better nor worse, on an average, than their neighbors. Possibly there may be a pearl hidden in each of them, somewhere, if only circumstances could find it. Probably they will go down to the grave with it unfound.

It was late when they went home, and found the four tireless whist-players still sitting over their interminable game. Our theatre party indulged in a few jokes at their expense, then gathered around the grate at the furthest end of the room, and languidly commented on the play. Mrs. Franklin Hayfred came in from a party, and stood a monument of pink silk, blonde and wilted roses. These last she tore off with pettish fingers, and tossed into the fire.

"I do believe that Dora Lawson tries to imitate me!" she said, glancing at Bessie. "She always contrives to wear the same thing that I do, and to put some touch to it that I have not. Bessie Lang, do you tell her what I am going to wear?"

"Nonsense!" said Bessie, in some heat. "If I told her she wouldn't wear it on any account. I dare say that she thinks you copy her."

"It is very strange," the lady said, nodding her head. "This is the third time. Her dress was precisely like mine, and the laces the same; but she quite extinguished me by wearing a scarf of silver gauze, and a veil of silver gauze at the back of her head. They called her "Love in a mist," and I was only a woman in a pink gown!"

The company laughed a little.

"They say that her lover is in a Scotch mist," some one said. "It is believed that she has discarded him."

"O no!" said Bessie, eagerly. "It is a mistake. Dora herself assured me that the rumor was quite unfounded."

"At all events, she scarcely noticed him all this evening," Mrs. Hayfred said. "It was quite tragical—my lady brilliant, frosty and all-conquering, the gentleman pale, fierce, disdainful. It was quite like a novel, I assure you. I shouldn't be surprised if he were to kill her."

"I wish that she would bring him down a little," Tom Calvert said, heartily. "His supercilious ways are unbearable. He has a way of glancing over you from head to foot that makes you clench your hand, and wish that he would say something as insolent as his looks."

"I'm so sleepy!" yawned Bessie, to cover her annoyance at the turn the conversation had taken.

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"You've got a grand illumination in your room," Mrs. Hayfred remarked, as the husband and wife rose.

Bessie turned hastily, her face growing pale. "There's no light in our room. We haven't been up since we came home from the theatre."

"Then you left the gas burning," was the answer. "For the room was a blaze of light when I rode up the avenue. I wondered that you had the curtains up. But I am quite sure that some one was there."

Bessie shrank back from the door, and stood with her face so that no one saw it.

"Perhaps Mrs. White went in to see if the room was on fire," Mrs. Howard suggested. "I don't believe that burglars would come so early, or make so bright a light."

"I think I did leave the gas burning," Mr. Lang said; so, taking courage, Bessie bade the company good-night, and followed her husband up stairs. She felt herself grow chilly as she reached the corridor, but setting her mouth firmly, walked on by her husband's side. Opening the door, they found the room perfectly dark; but a breath of chill air broke over them, and stopped them on the threshold.

"The window must be open," said Bessie, with chattering teeth.

"I can't think what Mrs. Hayfred wanted to tell such a story for," said Mr. Lang, with very unusual sharpness, as he went to light the gas.

Bessie went into the room, and, making a great effort, shut the door after her. It seemed as though she were shutting out all wholesome influences, and closing herself and husband into a living tomb. The air had a chill in which both shivered, though each strove to disguise it from the other; and when the light streamed up, Bessie saw that her husband's face had a peculiar and frightful pallor, like that which is seen under a green light.

Her very fright giving her courage, she went into the painted chamber alone, and herself lighted the gas there. There was no window open in either of the rooms, and a hot air was coming steadily through the register.

"These rooms have the most disagreeable draughts," Mr. Lang said. "I must speak to Mrs. White about it. I think that the doors need listing."

Bessie tried to chase the phantoms from her mind, and put a commonplace interpretation on all that she had seen and heard. She was ashamed to speak her fears to her husband, and had, also, a sort of fear in the matter. It seemed to her that if once she should speak of such things their occurrence would be more frequent.

The two went to bed, and pretended to sleep; but each was wakeful and nervous. Mrs. Lang was as much annoyed and mystified as his wife, but a great deal more ashamed of mentioning it. Besides, he didn't wish to frighten her, and resolved to wait till she should show some signs of alarm.

As they lay, the others of the household came up stairs, and went into their several rooms. They could hear the good-nights, and the shutting of doors. Then all was silent. The young moon had set, and a gray mist overspread the stars. The chamber was dark, save for two squares of pale light that marked the windows. Both held their breath in that silence, and each was heartily wishing that the other would speak or move, when suddenly the bed shook with a strong shudder.

Bessie caught her husband's arm, giving a stifled cry of terror. He lay silent for a moment, too astonished and horror-stricken to be able to stir.

"Frank! Frank!" gasped Bessie, and he felt her hand grow cold in his.

At that moment a few low, detached knocks were heard on the head of their bed, growing louder, and travelling towards the foot; and then the bed shook again, this time seeming as though some person were under it, trying to lift it and throw its occupants out. As the last shudder rattled the head-board, Frank Lang sprang out of bed. "I will know what this means," he said, lighting the gas as quickly as possible, and turning on the full column. It burned dim and blue, and as Bessie looked at her husband she almost screamed in terror at his looks. He had that same singular paleness which she had observed when they came up stairs, and his hair seemed to rise on his head. There was a wild look in his eyes, and though he had tried to speak with resolution, his words were articulated like those of one whose speech is affected by paralysis, the words thick and indistinct.

She could only lie half-fainting with terror, while he searched the room, looking in every possible place of concealment. He even made her rise from the bed, and took off the clothes and mattresses, closely examining the bedstead and the spring bottom. There was nothing to be seen that could solve the mystery.

"What does ail the gas?" Bessie ventured to ask, at last.

"The devil, probably!" her husband replied.

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"I think that he has possession of this room."

"Did you ever see anything before?" asked Bessie, beginning to suspect that he had.

"Yes. Have you?"

"Yes; and I've been wanting to tell you, but thought you would laugh at me," Bessie said.

"Well, perhaps we may as well laugh at each other," Mr. Lang said, making an effort to throw off his terror. "I dare say that we shall find out the meaning of all this. Suppose we go to bed again, and see what will happen?"

"Hark!" the wife whispered, her face growing white again.

A faint knocking began near the door, and travelled slowly around the room, multiplying as it proceeded, and growing louder, so that when it reached the windows the sashes rattled under the strokes.

"O my God!" shivered Bessie, cowering in her husband's arms.

The knocking ceased, and gradually the gas burned more brightly, till the light w clear and full as ever.

"There! I hope it is over now," the husband said.

"I shall not go to bed again to-night," Bessie said, after waiting a while. "I shall dress, and if I hear any more of this, I will call Mrs. White. I tell you, Frank, there has been something dreadful done in this room!"

The two dressed themselves, and sat for a few minutes in a cold and uncomfortable silence. Then they began to talk in whispers, trying in vain to account for what was unaccountable, each trying to deceive the other, and failing utterly. An hour passed so, and as there was no sign of anything extraordinary, they began to grow a little sleepy.

"I think that you had better lie down, and I will sit here by the bed," the husband said. "I don't believe there'll be any more nonsense to-night."

"I don't know," she hesitated. "I hate to have you sit up, but I dread to lie down."

"It is two o'clock now. I will sit till four," he said. "Then, if all should be quiet, I will take a nap, too."

"Wont you be lonesome?" asked the wife, wistfully, ashamed to leave him to watch alone, yet scarcely able to keep her eyes open, and not daring to have both off guard.

"I'll wake you up if I am," her husband said, smiling, and trying to feel very brave.

"Well," Bessie said, slowly rising.

As she did so she seemed struck motionless, and like marble, white and cold. There was the sound of a soft, slow step in the other room, and the rustling of a lady's dress as she walked. The step and the rustling slowly approached the door of the room where they were, and when it neared the threshold, and the mysterious visitor seemed about to appear before them, Bessie Lang's restrained nerves could bear no more, and with a shrill scream she sank fainting on to the floor.

"Bless me! what is that?" said Mrs. Margrave, rousing herself, in her room across the hall. "Colonel Margrave, wake up! Something has happened that is dreadful. Do make haste! Somebody screamed, and there are people out in the hall. I do believe that it is Bessie Lang. She has been frightened by that ghostly trash. Are you ever going to be dressed? My goodness! don't stop to curl your whiskers! Of all the men—"

Opening his door, Colonel Margrave saw Frank Lang out in the hall, supporting his wife in his arms. He had brought her directly out, knowing that it would not do for her to open her eyes in that room, and feeling himself that he was better out of it.

"What's the matter?" asked Colonel Margrave, in astonishment.

"My wife has fainted. Wont you help me to carry her down stairs?"

"Down stairs!" repeated the gentleman, going out. "Why not carry her into your own room?"

"Curse the room!" cried Mr. Lang, with energy.

"Bring her in here!" called out Mrs. Margrave, who had hastily donned a dressing-gown.

Bessie revived as she was laid on the bed, but seemed scarcely in her senses. She started up wildly, seeming to see some frightful object, her eyes staring, her face covered with perspiration.

"Shut the door! shut the door!" she gasped hoarsely, and seemed relieved when they had obeyed her. "O Mrs. Margrave!" she said, "I wouldn't own to you that I had seen or heard anything in those rooms. I had, and so had Frank; but we did not even tell each other. But to-night we have seen enough."

She shivered, and dropped her face into the pillows.

"Mercy! what is it?" cried Mrs. Margrave, glancing fearfully towards the door.

Frank Lang told them everything that they had seen and heard that night, adding what he had not spoken of before.

"I have noticed things to be odd for several

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weeks," he said. "I have felt those creeping chills, as though the room were suddenly filled with ice, and I could see that visitors felt them, though they said nothing. I have seen them, when talking cheerfully, suddenly become grave, shiver, then glance about to see where the cold air came from. Mrs. Freeman once insisted that the window must be open in the inner room, and would not be content till Bessie went to see. I have had that feeling come over me in those rooms many a time, a creeping cold, a rising of my hair, and such a sense of horror as I cannot describe. I'm not a coward, nor a superstitious fellow, and I never had any such experience before. I firmly believe that there's something evil in that room. The first thing that I saw I blamed poor Bessie, though I didn't tell her. I was coming up the avenue, late in the afternoon, and saw her sitting in the window, looking out for me; and just at her side, and looking over her shoulder, was a strange face—a woman with long, black hair hanging over her shoulders. I wondered who it could be, and when I got in, finding no one there, I asked Bessie who it was. She said there had been no one there, and insisted on it. I didn't describe the person, and dropped the subject. But I really thought that Bessie was deceiving me, and I felt hurt about it for a long time. But one evening, just before dinner, Bessie was in the chamber finishing dressing, and I out in the parlor, sitting by the window, and glancing toward the bedroom door, I saw a woman standing there in the dim light, with her hair hanging over her shoulders. At first I thought that it was Bessie, and was going to ask her if she was no nearer being dressed than that, when I heard Bessie scream inside the chamber. I felt cold in an instant, and started up, calling out to know what was the matter. As I spoke, and ran towards the bedroom, the figure faded without moving from the threshold. I found Bessie looking pale, but she said that she had stuck a pin in her shoulder."

"I saw her, too," Bessie said, from her pillows. "Let me stay here to-night, Mrs. Margrave. I cannot go near that room again."

Colonel Margrave had been greatly interested in these revelations, and he immediately proposed that Bessie should remain with his wife, while he and Mr. Lang should spend the rest of the night in the painted chamber. It was settled so, and while the two women lay listening and trembling, their husbands searched the two rooms thoroughly, then laid down, dressed, to be ready for anything that might happen.

The hours wore slowly to daylight, and there was no sign of any supernatural doings. And with the daylight came courage. Bessie went back to her own room, and Colonel Margrave returned to his, all agreeing to keep their night's adventure to themselves, since no one else had been disturbed.

"I'm inclined to think that it's all their imagination, in spite of your great stories," Colonel Margrave said, to his wife. "I think that they had been asleep."

"O fudge, Colonel Margrave!" his wife said, impatiently. "Can't you see that they are no more likely to be imposed on than you are? Then how will you explain the singular fact of their both imagining the same things when they never told each other, but tried to conceal what they had seen and heard? I don't like a too ready credulity, but a too stubborn skepticism is just as bad, and no whit wiser."

Bessie Lang slept late, and she and her husband had breakfast sent up to them. When that meal was over they sent for their landlady, and told her the whole story of their experience in her room.

"Now, Mrs. White," Mr. Lang said, "I want you to tell us what you know about it. We have a right to require that. I am not sure that you had any right to withhold the information so long."

Mrs. White looked pale and troubled. "Perhaps I ought to have told you," she said; "but everybody laughs at such things, and I didn't know how you would take it. Besides, I couldn't be sure that you would ever be troubled any, and I can't get along well without letting these rooms. I have never seen anything to compare with what you have seen. Once I did see that lady at the window, when I was coming up the avenue, and once I saw a light shining out over and under the door when the room was untenanted, and when I knew that there was no one in it. But I have never seen anything of a woman when I have been inside. It is true, two of my boarders have left on account of it; but they didn't want me to say anything about it, and they didn't say much to me about what they saw and heard. I never knew of any one being touched or hurt here; and I thought it likely that if any real courageous person came in, he could drive away the evil, if there is any."

"How long have you had the house?" Mr. Lang asked.

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"About eight years."

"Who had it before you?"

"Mr. William White, my uncle."

"Did they ever say anything to you about these rooms being troubled?"

"Not till after I got into the house," Mrs. White replied. "My uncle's wife was dead, and he had a housekeeper. This housekeeper had a spite at me, because I prevented my uncle's marrying her, as he came near doing once. I think that she wanted to get me in, so that I should lose by the house, on account of these rooms."

"What did they surmise was the meaning of these appearances?" asked Mr. Lang.

"My uncle never believed much in them," the landlady replied. "He was one of those matter-of-fact persons who are never impressed by anything that they can't weigh and measure. He used to say that he believed it to be a humbug; but I know that he gave up the house on account of it. The housekeeper told me that a lady died here suddenly, by an accident, let me see! about eighteen years ago. Before that, she said there was no sign of anything wrong; and they had been here three years before she died."

"What about this lady?" asked Bessie, with dilating eyes.

"The housekeeper told me," Mrs. White replied, "that there was a very handsome couple came here eighteen or nineteen years ago, and took these rooms. Their names were Mr. and Mrs. Berkley, and they called themselves a newly-married couple. They saw no company at all, but went out often together, and seemed very happy for a while. The housekeeper said that she always noticed that they rode out alone, and in a close carriage, very often, and that the lady always wore a veil. She used to think that they, especially the lady, avoided observation, and she suspected that it must have been a runaway match. She said that they were the handsomest couple she ever saw, the gentleman noble and princely-looking, and the lady a most brilliant beauty. She had a dark complexion, but was very sparkling, and had long, black hair, that would come far below her waist."

At this description, Mr. and Mrs. Lang exchanged glances.

"After a while, the housekeeper thought that they didn't get along so well," Mrs. White went on. "She used to hear loud words sometimes, and the lady would walk up and down the room crying when she was alone. They had their meals in their own room, and sometimes for days Mrs. Berkley would scarcely taste a mouthful. The housekeeper would hear a word, now and then, as she went in and out, and from them she gathered that the lady wanted to do something, and the gentleman wouldn't let her do it.

"One day their dinner had been sent up, and the servant had just come out of the room, when their bell got a furious ring. The housekeeper ran up, thinking that something was the matter, and found Mrs. Berkley lying in her husband's arms, evidently dying. Her eyes were fixed, and there was just a faint breath on her lips, and that was gone in a few minutes. Everything was done, a doctor sent for, and everything tried; but she was dead. She was pierced to the heart by a long, steel stiletto, that she used in embroidering.

"Her husband said that she was just about taking her seat at the table; but before laying aside her embroidery, wanted to pierce one more eyelet in the thick linen she was at work on. The cloth was stiff, and there was a paper behind it, and as she pushed on the stiletto, it slipped and went into her breast, piercing her to the heart.

"The gentleman seemed nearly frantic with grief, and went away just as soon as his wife was buried. There was no one at the funeral but the gentleman himself, and the sexton; and Mr. Berkley gave the housekeeper quite a sum of money to keep people out. He said he did not want his wife's dead body to be insulted by the gaze of curiosity. Not a soul looked at her but her husband, the two doctors, the housekeeper and my Uncle William."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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A WOMAN'S ERROR.

BY MRS. R. B. EDSON.

CHAPTER I.

Up and down the long line of rocky coast, the wind roared and shrieked, and the waves dashed fiercely over the low, sandy bar and sunken rocks, scarce a league to the northward of the little inlet that made, by an abrupt curve some three or four miles inland, a small but very convenient harbor for fishing-vessels and light-draught coasters. Once in a while, driven by sudden storms, some larger craft sought the protection of the little harbor; but not often, for the entrance was narrow and dangerous, and Morey, who kept the lighthouse on Barry's Bluff, was as grim and abrupt as the little headland that bristled its gray, jagged sides to the sea. Once, more than twenty years ago, a ship went to pieces on the harbor bar, in trying to effect an entrance; and ever since, Hugh Morey, who had heretofore been a most ready and efficient pilot, grew grim and repellant, exerting himself to the utmost to warn all vessels off the coast who were not perfectly familiar with its soundings.

There was a little story, savoring something of romance, connected with that ship, which was as familiar to every man, woman and child in Brent as the alphabet; although the younger people, looking at the weather-beaten face and grizzly beard of Hugh Morey, grew sometimes skeptical as to its truth. To them, love was a thing of youth, and beauty, and gentleness; and they forgot that Hugh Morey was not always old and grizzled, as well as that other most potent fact—which perhaps they did not know—that the snows of the brow do not necessarily extinguish the fires of the heart.

And so it seemed to them rather a bit of sad romance than a terrible reality—the story of the pretty English maiden who had left parents and friends, and crossed the perilous deep, only to be cast a bruised and mangled corse at the very feet of her lover. But the older people remembered the five long years of patient saving that had at last enabled him to send for the little girl whose heart he had brought with him across the sea; they remembered, too, the little cottage at the foot of the Bluff, which he had built with all a lover's fond anticipations; and alas! they remembered the beautiful English burial service that was read there one dark day, and the fair face, with its golden curls falling in a wet, tangled mass over the pulseless bosom. They remembered, too, one night, when a lurid flame lit up the sky, and how the sun rose over a mass of cold gray ashes where the pretty cottage had stood. People felt instinctively that it was his own hand that had destroyed it, and, with tender thoughtfulness, offered no condolence.

Some five years afterward, his sister Mollie Sterne, who had been married and widowed before she was twenty, came to America also, and thenceforward the two lived quietly together beside the sea. Mollie, however, was very unlike her brother. He was dark, silent and taciturn; she was bright, cheerful and happy. Her round, ruddy face radiated perpetual sunshine. No clouds were ever dark enough or heavy enough to obscure its brightness.

There was a little disappointment which met Mollie Stone upon her arrival, however, which sent a little shadow across her heart, but like all the shadows which had fallen there, it only made it tenderer and sweeter. Like the summer tempest, which gives such an exquisite clearness and softness to the sky, so sorrow and disappointment gave new depth and serenity to the atmosphere of her life.

In the ship which had brought Hugh Morey's betrothed wife, was also another young English girl from the same town, Bath. But Alicia Kent came not alone; her parents and two younger brothers accompanied her. But alas! they came not with her up the quiet streets of Brent, or sat with her evermore in the pleasant twilights. The cruel harbor bar rolled forever its solemn surge between them. But Alicia Kent was young

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and fair, and, ere six months had elapsed, had become the worshipped wife of Walter Hargrave, the eldest son of old John Hargrave, one of the wealthiest men in the county. He was terribly angry with Walter for marrying a penniless girl; for, though the Kents had been in good circumstances at home, their whole fortune, which had been converted to gold, went down in the ill fated ship. There were hard words between them, and threats of disinheritance; but, despite them all, Walter married the woman of his choice, and was forbidden the house in consequence.

John Hargrave was a blustering, self-willed man, and of course said a good many hard things, which were duly reported, and sometimes exaggerated, to Walter, thus fostering and increasing the hardness and coldness between them, until they became almost as strangers. But Alicia Hargrave lived scarcely four years from the time of her marriage, and this was the disappointment that met Mollie Sterne on the shores of the New World.

Before her marriage Mollie had lived with the Kents, and when Alicia heard of the death of Mollie's husband, an overwhelming desire took possession of her to have her come to her in her new home. As happy as she was in the love of her husband and child, she grew almost sick with longing, sometimes, for the sight of a familiar face—a face that might bring back, mayhap, something of the old time—a face that the suns and airs of dear old England had kissed, and thus made sacred to her. And so she had written to Mollie Sterne, telling her of her kind and noble husband, and dwelling with all a mother's fondness on the loveliness and sweetness of her little Lena, and beseeching her to come to her, that her cup of happiness might be quite full.

And so Mollie Sterne came to Brent, but too late to add to the happiness of Alicia Hargrave, for, dearer than the face of a friend, were the dear ones that had dawned on her in paradise.

In the meantime, the man who had valued money more than love, had gone where his money could purchase him no immunities, or give him any claim to superiority. Gold and silver, bonds and mortgages were not current there, and so John Hargrave died a poor man, after all.

Although the threat had been often made, no one ever believed that he would finally disinherit his son. It was thought only a part of the characteristic bluster of the man, especially as, during the latter portion of his life, he had grown quite friendly with Walter, coming once or twice to dine with him. He came one day in an unusually gracious mood. He had a new plan, he said; and then he called little Lena to him, and asked her "how she would like to live in a big house, and have horses, and carriages, and servants?"

The child opened her great brown eyes to their widest capacity, and said she "*should* like the horses and the big house." The old man laughed, kissed her bit of a rose-leaf face, and told her that "to-morrow he would come over and tell her all about it."

Ah, these to-morrows that never come!—eternity is full of them. Before another dawning, John Hargrave had done with all earthly hopes and plans. Dane came over to tell Walter. He was so white and agitated, that he could not speak at first.

"What is it?" Walter said, in a voice of apprehension.

"Father—is—is—dead!" he gasped, sinking into a chair.

"Where?—when? Dane, what is the meaning of this? Why wasn't I called?" he asked, sternly.

"There was no chance, Walter; and, besides, I—I didn't know—as—as—"

"As I would come when my father was dying! Dane Hargrave, do you think I am a brute?"

"Don't be angry, Walter. It would have done no good if you had been there. He did not speak or open his eyes after he was taken."

"But I would like to have been there just the same, Dane. He was my father just as much as yours, and, if there have been hard feelings in the past, it is no time to remember them now. Besides, he has seemed so different lately. Only yesterday, he said:

"What?" in a quick, startled voice.

"Some things it will be pleasant for me to remember," he answered, evasively, putting on his hat and coat. And, at that moment, a haunting suspicion crept into his heart—a suspicion that rankled there many a weary year.

Great was the indignation in Brent when John Hargrave's will was made public. Of all his vast property, only a paltry one hundred dollars was given to Walter; the rest all went to Dane. It was not the loss of the property that grieved Walter, but the proof of his father's feeling toward him, carried as

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it was beyond his life. If it had been two years before, he would not have been so much surprised; but lately a hope, not half-acknowledged until he saw it destroyed, had sprung up in his heart that they might eventually be reconciled, and he take his old place in his father's heart. He knew, and so did Dane—and for that matter all Brent—that he had been the favorite son before this estrangement. Not that he would have taken the advantage of it one penny's worth; but he knew, and knew that his father knew, Dane's weak, vacillating nature, so easily controlled and so easily tempted.

There were those who advised Walter to contest the will, but he was too proud to do it; besides, he knew there was no flaw in the will. It had been drawn up three years before, when his father was in the zenith of his anger at his marriage, and at a time when his active business operations proved the strength of his mind, as well as his passions. The witnesses were men of integrity, and the attorney who drafted it beyond suspicion. Perhaps, at first, he had some thought that Dane might make some more righteous division of the property—he knew that he should, in an exchange of circumstances; but when he saw the cold, indifferent look on the face of his brother's wife, and knew how strong her influence was over him, the hope, if it had amounted to as much, died out of his heart. For a while, the thought that she had the use and control of all the dainty linen and elegant silver that were his mother's vexed and annoyed him. But the loss of his wife and the care of his child diverted his thoughts, and by degrees it dropped out of his thoughts, or only came at long intervals.

A coldness had grown up between Dane and himself, until one would never have believed them the children of one mother, who had folded them both in one embrace, and prayed that they might always be gentle, and tender, and true to each other.

There are those who believe that those who have passed on know, and see, and sympathize with all the joys and sorrows of those they leave behind—that, more clearly than in the earth-life, they see and know all the hidden workings of the heart, before they are wrought out in deeds. If this theory be true, alas for the fabled happiness of heaven! There is too much of wrong, and sin, and pain, in all our lives, to have them laid quite bare, even to our dearest friends. Who of us has thoughts so pure and hearts so stainless, as to be willing to unveil them utterly to the eyes of those we love? We feel, instinctively, that there is something there that might pain them, and so, out of our love, we strive to hide all our little discrepancies from their eyes, lest it make them sorrowful. There is only One—the Patient and All-Pitiful—whom we dare trust to look in the secret places of our hearts and thoughts. We know how tenderly he will judge us, and only unto him do we dare come with unveiled hearts.

And so sixteen years had glided down the shadowy shores of eternity, and now Dane Hargrave stood upon its brink. He had been a rich man—a successful man, as men count success; but, standing there on the verge of time, he saw, as in a mirror, all the barrenness and poverty of his life. He saw how success had been but another name for defeat—a defeat more sad and terrible than that where armies go down in battle, or fortunes are wasted in a breath. These things concern the body; his concerned the soul. A crippled soul! what fate can be more sad?—what defeat more dreadful?

The wind howled and shrieked through the great chimneys, and the rain plashed drearily against the closed shutters, and dripped dismally from the eaves of the old Hargrave mansion on the night which opens this chapter. There was a strange hush about the house—a sort of awed silence, broken only by the fitful strife of the elements. Down in the kitchen the servants spoke in whispers, looking over their shoulders with furtive glances. Two men sat a little apart from the rest, conversing in low tones. One was a fresh, Saxon face, a little sun-burned, except the broad, open forehead, which was white and fair as a girl's. A profusion of chestnut hair and beard, and a pair of honest, sunny-looking eyes, which matched them to a charm, with a strong, well-knit frame, developed and hardened by labor. His companion was a much smaller man, but with a hint of strength in the lithe, supple limbs, that was not to be despised. He had a dark, sallow skin, a low, retreating forehead, and black, beetling brows, from beneath which a pair of keen, restless eyes flashed and glowed in the half-shadow in which they sat like tiny globes of pale flame. They were both habited in plain working-clothes, and were both well toward forty, though the Saxon face looked much the youngest.

A woman opened the door and looked in.

"Luke," she said, in a voice that sounded

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strange and unnatural, "Mr. Hargrave wants to see you."

The man with the fair face and chestnut hair arose silently and followed her, but not before a quick look of intelligence had passed between his companion and the woman. Through the long hall and up the thickly-padded stairs, that gave no echo to their footsteps, they went in swift silence, each one busy with their thoughts. At the head of the stairs, the man said:

"Is he worse, Mrs. Hargrave?"

"There is no change," she answered, in the same unnatural voice.

But Luke Varney, who had not seen the sick man for twenty-four hours, started back at sight of the change those few hours had wrought. A young man arose from a seat near the bed and walked towards the window, lifting the heavy folds of purple damask, and letting them fall again with a little shudder as a fierce gust of wind and rain swept against the glass. The woman was looking at him keenly.

"You are nervous, Leslie," she said, in a low voice. "You had better go down stairs a while."

A look of relief came into his face.

"If you can spare me, Celia."

"Certainly. I am not afraid. Why should I be?"

"But you look strange, and your eyes have an unnatural look in them. Hadn't I better stay?"

"No, you had better go. Doctor Dinsmore will be here in half an hour, and I can speak to you if I need you."

When Leslie Wolcott—Mrs. Hargrave's half-brother—went into the kitchen, he found it occupied only by the women servants.

"Where is Gray?" he asked, looking round.

"He went out a minute ago," one of them answered. "Did you want anything?"

"O no, nothing particular." And he sat down before the fire with a little nervous shudder. "It is a terrible night to be out. I fear Doctor Dinsmore will be unable to get here."

"There never was a storm yet that stopped *him*," said one of the women; "but I don't suppose he can do any good."

"No, I suppose not. But one feels better to have a physician in the house, even if he knows that he can do no good."

Mrs. Hargrave was not surprised, after the door had closed upon Leslie, to have her husband ask to be left alone a moment with Luke Varney. It was just what she expected, just what she had provided for. She knew, too, what he wanted of him; he need not have sent her out of the room for that; but if he *should* say anything else! Well, it would be better for her to know that, too, she decided, stopping with her ear to the door which she did not shut very closely.

"Luke," said the dying man, "come here; come close, for there must nobody hear. I *must* see Walter before I die. I have something to confess to him—I dare not die until I have—something that has been a millstone about my neck for seventeen years. I know that you are honest and true, and will not fail me in this terrible strait, and that is why I have sent for you. I want you to go to him at once—you may tell him what I have told you—and bring him here before midnight. What time is it now?"

"A little past eight, sir. I will go at once. Mr. Walter will come without any urging, never you fear. He has sent over every day to see how you were."

"He has? I didn't know it. O Luke, if he shouldn't forgive me!"

"Don't you worry about that, sir. Mr. Walter isn't one to bear a grudge. Shall I say where I am going?" he asked, stooping over the sick man.

"No, O no!" he said, anxiously.

"All right!" he answered, briskly, buttoning his coat as he went towards the door.

Mrs. Hargrave was pacing up and down the long hall when he came out.

"Tell Leslie I want him a moment," she said, without turning her face.

"Yes ma'am," he said, hurrying down the stairs that she might not have time to ask him where he was going. He need not have feared her asking—there was no need. She waited in the hall till Leslie came up.

"Please sit by Dane until I come back, Leslie," she said, meeting him at the top of the stairs, her face still in shadow.

"You are not ill, Celia?" he asked, anxiously, laying his hand on her arm. She threw it off with a little nervous laugh, that sounded weird and uncanny in the unnatural stillness.

"Ill? no. How nervous you are to-night! I am only going to speak to one of the servants."

Leslie stood looking after her as her dark robes swept against the banisters, and vanished through a side door that led by a dark passage to the library; then, with a little

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involuntary shiver, he went in to his brother-in-law.

Leslie Wolcott was one of those peculiar temperaments that are affected by atmospheric changes. He was a complete barometer. When it was calm and sunny, he was full of easy, indolent grace, his face as bright, and his spirits as light as the rarefied air he breathed. Dull, gray days clouded his spirits, and his changeful face reflected the intangible shadow; but when the winds and storms were out, something of their wild spirit ran like an electric fire through every nerve and artery of his being. He *could not* keep still, any more than the autumn leaves that soared and sailed on the wings of the fitful wind. His pulse was at fever-heat, his eyes darkened and flashed, and little flushes of heat and chill swept over him alternately.

And to-night, with the shadowy footfall of Azrael echoing down the long corridors and through the great, silent rooms, coming every moment nearer, nearer, till he could almost feel the chill of his intangible presence, O, what a night it was to him! Perhaps, I do not know, it was some premonition of the presence of fate that hovered about him *that* night of all nights—the fate that brightened and darkened, blessed and cursed all his future life—that filled him, soul and body, with a strange, subtle flood of electricity.

In absolute contrast was the man that opened the door, and came quietly and gravely into the room. Every nerve and pulse was under the most perfect control. Like a well-trained horse, every muscle and sinew was held in sharp abeyance. There was no lack of fire and spirit under all this, but the *will* was supreme. The first thing you saw in looking into Dr. Dinsmore's face was its strength. One never thought of beauty in connection with him—it seemed something too effeminate. He laid his cool fingers a moment on Leslie's pulse in passing.

"Go out and walk off that fever, young man. Why, your blood is up to the boiling point," he said, earnestly, looking at the flushing face and burning eyes uplifted to his.

"Out! Good heavens, doctor, do you know what kind of a night it is?"

"Well, yes, I believe I do," a faint smile lighting his face.

"To be sure, when you have just come in."

"And you are just going out. Mind what I tell you now. Put on as much clothing as you please, but go out into the air and walk—walk until you are absolutely tired, even if it is only up and down in the yard."

"I *will* try it, doctor," he said; "for I believe I am almost insane. My head feels as if ten thousand hurricanes were confined in it."

Pausing a moment in the lower hall to put on his overcoat, he heard the door at the lower end of the passage leading to the library open softly, and a voice—he was quite sure it was Gray's—say:

"It will be soon enough when he comes back."

The answer came lower and more indistinct, but he was sure it was a woman's voice.

Some of the servants, he thought; but, going into the kitchen, he found the three women sitting as he had left them fifteen minutes ago.

"Isn't Gray in yet?" he asked, glancing around.

"No, nor Luke. Do you know where Luke went?" one of them asked.

"Didn't he go after Dinsmore?"

"No, he went the other way. I looked out to see. I hope you're not going out too, Mr. Wolcott?"

"O, I'm merely going to take a medical prescription," he laughed, winding a scarf round and round his neck.

The women looked at each other furtively. A faint suspicion that he was crazy crept into their minds, and they more than half expected the fluttering ends of the scarf were left purposely to tie about the limb of a tree; and when a little after Luke Varney came in, flushed and panting from his battle with the elements, they all asked, simultaneously:

"Have you seen Mr. Wolcott, Luke?"

"Seen him? I should think so."

"What is it, Luke?" they asked, breathlessly.

"Why, he's on a wager, I reckon. He's tearin' up and down the yard like mad!"

"O!" in a little disappointed chorus. They were expecting a first-class tragedy, and felt just a little aggrieved.

CHAPTER II.

About half a mile from the old Hargrave mansion, going toward Barry's Bluff, stood the little cottage of Walter Hargrave. It was a small, unpretending place, beside the great stone mansion, with its odd gables and porticos; but it was very pleasant, nevertheless, with its low, broad windows looking towards the sea. Lena Hargrave thought it just the

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dearest place in the world; and because she thought so, and because it was sanctified by her presence, Walter Hargrave thought so too. Since the death of her mother, Lena had been almost constantly with her father. There was an unusual attachment between the two, and Walter Hargrave, who was one of the most agreeable and intelligent of men, never wearied of exerting himself to instruct and entertain his pretty daughter; and she, in turn, studied all the little arts and graces with which most girls attract and enthrall their lovers, to fascinate and delight her father. She had been in company but very little, although nearly nineteen years of age, and was very simple and unsophisticated in the ways of the world, though she knew more of book lore than all the girls in Brent put together. She sketched delightfully, too, and a little water-color of Barry's Bluff, that hung on the sitting-room wall, was so like the original, that one would almost swear it was its reflection. She had a fresh, pure voice, and, in the pleasant twilights, beguiled her father with little ballads and sweet, solemn hymns, which she had caught somehow, for music had not been one of her studies, only her recreation.

It was a pure, simple life they two lived together, neither choosing to make many friends, their books, and pictures, and flowers, serving in their stead. Nine-tenths of the people in the world live, and die, and never know what pleasant, and healthful, and companionable friends they are.

"There is a strong sea outside to-night, Le a," Mr. Hargrave said, coming into the bright, cheerful little room. "I can hear it breaking and roaring over the bar; but, thank God, the wind is blowing off shore, instead of onto this cruel coast! I never hear that peculiar roaring, surging sound of the waves, but it brings back your mother's face, just as I saw it first, lying white and dripping in the arms of Hugh Morey, with the long, heavy braids of brown hair falling across his breast. Poor Hugh! *his* little girl never opened her blue eyes again. She was a fair, gentle little thing, your mother said. I think, sometimes, how different his life would have been, if hers had been blended with it, brightening and softening it."

"Hugh is always very gentle with me, father. I think his roughness is only an armor, and that underneath his heart is true and tender. And Mollie! why, an own mother could not be kinder and tenderer."

"She loved your mother, child," he said, a little unsteadily. Then suddenly, as if the subject was too painful, he asked, "Did you know that *he* is failing very rapidly?"

"Uncle Dane?"

"Yes. Doctor Dinsmore told me so to-night. He says he has gone down fast within a week. It is quick consumption, the doctor says, hastened and aggravated by some mental trouble which he cannot get at. He asked me if I knew."

"Do you, father?"

"I don't know, child. I hope not," he said, soberly, the old suspicion rising and walking like a troubled wraith up and down before him. She sat a moment looking into the fire, then she said, quietly and gravely:

"Father, I think you had better go to him and see. If he should die wanting to see you—if he has anything to say to you—"

A sudden rap interrupted the conversation. A vague presentiment of what was coming came over them both. The roses faded suddenly out of Lena's cheeks, and her father's lips grew white and rigid. It was as if, for an instant, they were gifted with prescience, and the veil was suddenly lifted from before their eyes.

"Come in, Luke," Mr. Hargrave said, with no surprise in his face at seeing him. It seemed as if he had been expecting him, and knew why he had come. There was no need of kind-hearted Luke Varney's attempt to come to it carefully. "My brother has sent for me, Luke," he said, quietly.

"Yes. How did you know?" It was no unusual thing for Luke to drop in at Mr. Walter's, as he had always called him since he was a young man at home, and he was chore-boy for the old squire.

"I don't know, Luke, how I knew, but I did. Is he much worse?"

"I don't think he will live till morning. *He* said, 'bring him here before midnight.'"

"Did *she*—Mrs. Hargrave know you came?"

"No; nobody knew a breath about it. He didn't want they should. He sent for me, and said I must come after you at once. Perhaps," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "I had better tell you just what he did say."

"You say she did not know?"

"No; he shut her out of the room. I don't know why he should, though, because she will know it of course when you come. If it hadn't been for her, he would have sent

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for you a week ago. I heard her tell Gray so, though she didn't know I did."

"I wouldn't say anything to a stranger, Luke, but you know the whole bitter story through, and I don't mind telling you that I think she and Gray—(he always hated me, because I detected him in a crime, though I have kept his miserable secret all these years)—have kept Dane and myself estranged."

"Well, perhaps that is what he has got to tell you. He said he had something to confess to you—that he could not die until he had seen you and asked your forgiveness. And then he said, 'O Luke, if he shouldn't forgive me, after all!"

"Poor boy! poor Dane!" he said, softly. "Hurry back as quick as you can, and tell him that I will be there immediately. Tell him not to worry about anything that concerns me, for he is already forgiven, whatever it may be."

"I will, sir, I will!" Luke exclaimed, rising and drawing his coat-sleeve furtively across his eyes.

When he was gone, Walter Hargrave begun his preparations for obeying the summons. He took the light and went into his bedroom, and, through the half-open door, Lena saw him take her mother's picture out of a drawer and put it in his bosom. Then he took out his pocket-book and counted its contents deliberately.

"Father, why do you do that?" Lena said, coming and standing in the door.

"I wanted to be sure how much I left you, dear."

"Aren't you going to take it?"

"No, child; you will need it most."

"I? Why, how strange you talk, father! One would think you were going on a long voyage," she said, with a little laugh.

He put the purse in the drawer, put on his coat, and stood leaning against the mantel, drawing on his overshoes.

How many times she thought of it afterward, remembering every little gesture and expression of his face as he talked with her; remembering even the long thread of crimson silk that he had caught up with his sleeve from her little work-basket, and the corner of his wristband that was frayed a little. She remembered how noble and handsome he looked, with a little flush of excitement staining the pale olive of his cheek, and his mouth tremulous with emotion. He went as far as the door, and then turned and came back.

"Kiss me, Pretty," he said, coming and leaning over her with a lover's fondness.

She put up her lips with a little laugh. "You foolish papa!" she said; wondering all the time in her heart, if the world held another quite so good, and tender, and handsome, as her father.

He held her in his arms a moment, then he put her away and walked slowly towards the door, pausing once or twice and looking back.

The wind seemed to gather strength and fury with the lengthening hours, and the rain made little gullies across the sandy roads, and improvised lakes and rivers in the gardens and down the paths. It came down with a roar and plash on the jagged rocks, and washed the seaweed from their cold faces, and fell with a steady drip, drip, into the sea.

Hugh Morey brightened up his lamps, and came down into the little room where his sister sat sewing. He took two or three turns across the room and went and stood by the window, looking steadily out into the storm and darkness, and always out toward the harbor bar—always, always!

Mollie cast little furtive glances toward him as she stitched, looking as troubled as it was possible for her bright face to look. The wind blowing off shore and the tide coming in had churned the sea into a mass of gray-white foam, that roared and dashed against the jagged edges of the Bluff with impotent fury. Suddenly Hugh leaned forward a little.

"Mollie, come here!" he said, sharply. She came and stood beside him. "Look out there—there by the bar—and tell me what you see!" he said, in a hoarse whisper, his breath coming and going in short gasps.

Mollie gave him a quick, frightened look; she thought his mind, which had brooded so long over his trouble, had given way at last.

"Poor Hugh!" she said, soothingly, laying her hand on his arm.

"Look!" he said, almost fiercely, grasping her shoulder and pointing steadily towards the bar.

Mollie turned and looked. The light from the lighthouse fell with a red, sullen glare across the seething waters, and the black, writhing rocks, and the vague outline of the half-submerged bar.

"What do you see?" hoarsely.

"I see a boat. O God, Hugh, it is drifting straight onto the breakers!" the bright color dying out of her face.

"What else do you see? Quick!"

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"A man—a man lying on the bottom of the boat."

"And what else?" his voice dying away to an intense whisper.

"I should think—yes, it *is* a woman! I see her plainer now. A woman with long, heavy braids of brown hair falling over her white robe, which trails over the side of the boat. I can see her hand on the rudder, but her face is turned away. There, they are over the bar! How the mist blows in from the sea! Her face is this way now—if it would only lift a little!"

There was an instant of awed silence, both bending their faces harder against the pane, and looking with a strange, strained gaze out into the wild, weird night. Presently Mollie gave a quick, stifled gasp.

"My God! it is Alicia Kent!" and fell in a dead swoon upon the floor. The little clock on the mantel struck nine.

Hugh chafed her hands, and put water on her temples, and opened the door for the wind to blow in her face. She opened her eyes with a little shudder after a moment.

"You saw it, Hugh?" she said, in a faint whisper.

"Yes, Mollie, I saw it," he answered, solemnly. And they said no more about it, but afterward they remembered it with a little thrill of superstitious terror.

In the sick chamber all remained unchanged outwardly. Doctor Dinsmore, calm and grave, sat in a low easy-chair by the bedside of his patient, touching his wrist now and then, noting silently the fainter beating of the pulse. As it grew later, the sick man grew nervous, starting at every creaking of the blinds, or sudden beating of rain against the windows. The doctor's face was just the least bit in the world perplexed, especially as the nervousness increased as the moments wore away.

Mrs. Hargrave was outwardly calm. She arranged her husband's pillows, gave him his medicine, and performed all the little necessary attentions which he needed, with an air of grave calmness that would have deceived most persons; but Doctor Dinsmore's keen eyes saw the suppressed excitement burning under the quiet exterior. She kept it well under control though; but sometimes it leaped to her eye, but never stained her cheek, which was almost ghostly in its whiteness, and made more so by the strong contrast of her eyes and hair, which were of a dusky black. She watched her husband's face continually, and once or twice stooped and whispered in his ear, which seemed rather to increase than allay his restless nervousness.

"What time is it?" he asked, suddenly.

"Twenty minutes past nine," Doctor Dinsmore replied.

"It is over an hour. Why don't—" And he broke off abruptly and started half up in bed, as a limb of the huge elm that stood in the yard snapped and crashed against the side of the house, falling to the ground with a dull, crackling sound, twisted off by the force of the wind.

He laid back faint and exhausted, but with his eyes still turned towards the door with a painful look of expectancy in them. "Luke," he whispered, faintly; "bring Luke here. He must be back before this."

"Luke was in the kitchen when I came up, half an hour ago," Leslie said, coming out of the shadow of the curtains. "He came in while I was *out walking*," glancing queerly at the doctor.

"Where has Luke been?" Mrs. Hargrave said, addressing Leslie, but looking covertly at her husband.

"Celia," Dane Hargrave said, lifting his wild, burning eyes to her face, "he went over to tell Walter. I cannot, O Celia! I cannot die without—"

She bent suddenly over him, laying her face against his lips.

"Don't excite yourself, dear," she said, sweetly. "Of course Walter will come *now*, although he has shown neither feeling nor interest enough to come without summons. Shall I speak to Luke?"

"Yes, speak to him at once," Doctor Dinsmore said, authoritatively, a sudden light breaking in on his perplexity.

She went out quietly, but glanced back at him as she closed the door. It was only a swift, instantaneous glance, but he never forgot it. It haunted him for days and weeks, a strange, unfathomable something, that defied and mocked him with its intangible horror.

Luke Varney was walking up and down the long kitchen, his ruddy face a little paler and sterner than usual, with a look of anxiety in it altogether foreign to its accustomed placidity.

"Luke!" He turned with a little start, and flushed slightly before the dusky eyes—with pale, iridescent gleams in them—that were lifted searchingly to his face. "You have been after Walter Hargrave, Luke.

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Why did he not come? He is a tender brother—"

"Stop, Mrs. Hargrave!" Luke interposed, hastily. "Mr. Walter was very much affected to hear that his brother was—was so ill."

"Dying, Luke. You need not hesitate about speaking it, since we all know it. But why didn't he come?" the opal gleams in the dusky eyes burning redder and redder.

"That is what puzzles me. He said he would be here in a few minutes—indeed, he had started to get ready when I came away. I looked round once or twice, expecting to hear him coming on behind me, but the storm made such a noise, and it was so dark—"

"Did you meet any one?—that is, were there many out to-night in the storm? I should hope not," with a little shiver.

"No, it's not a very pleasant night to be out, I must say. There is a terrible sea outside, you may depend. I didn't see but one man out to-night."

"Who was it?" she asked, sharply.

"Leslie Wolcott," he said, looking half-amused as he remembered the fright of the women servants. Something came across her face; it was not a smile, but it lighted it like one.

"Mr. Hargrave wants to see you. He is troubled that Walter does not come, I think. You will be careful not to say anything to excite him?" she said, pausing and looking back, before she opened the chamber door.

"I will be careful," he replied. And they went in.

Dane Hargrave reached out his hand with an eager, uncertain motion. Luke Varney came and took it between his broad, strong palms. How cold it was! But he did not let it go, but knelt by the bedside, holding it in both of his.

"Walter?" came in a faint, questioning whisper.

"He said that he would come right away. I cannot think what keeps him. He was feeling very badly, sir."

Mrs. Hargrave gave Luke a little warning look, and he added:

"He'll be here right away, I'm sure. He said you weren't to worry anything about him, that—" And Luke paused suddenly, disconcerted by the menacing look in Mrs. Hargrave's face.

"What did you promise me?" she said, under her breath, leaning across the bed to smooth out the blankets.

Luke rose slowly from his knees, but the chill hand, as if imbued with sudden strength, clung to his with eager desperation.

"Said *what*, Luke?—what did he say?" his voice breaking into a shrill cry. And Luke answered, feeling, although he did not see, that her eyes were still upon him.

"That he would be here immediately—that everything between you was all right," he stammered.

"Did you tell him what I told you?" he persisted.

"Yes sir."

"All—*all*, Luke? Are you sure you told him all? Look at me, Luke, and tell me truly. You wouldn't deceive me, Luke—you never did, and now when I am dying—"

"I *will* tell you, Dane—Mr. Hargrave—"

"Dane, yes, Dane; call me that, Luke. You used to, you remember, in the old days, before *he* went away—the old happy days, Luke, before—" He paused with a little shudder.

"Yes, Dane, I remember," his voice softening, "and so does he. He said, when I had told him all, just what you told me, word for word, 'Poor Dane! poor boy! Tell him not to worry about anything that concerns me; that everything is already forgiven, whatever it may be.'"

The clasp on his hand tightened.

"You are not telling me this to comfort me, Luke?" he asked, eagerly, and glancing toward the door wistfully.

"No; I have only told you what he said, nothing more."

"Dear Walter!" And the chill hand relaxed its clasp, and fell limp and nerveless across the counterpane, and he lay back with closed eyes, a smile hovering about the wan lips, and lifting the shadow a little from his face.

Doctor Dinsmore silently motioned to Luke to withdraw, while he quietly proceeded to administer a cordial, to hold, if possible, the fluttering breath a little longer, till he came.

Slowly the moments wore away. Out in the hall the clock ticked with a painfully-distinct regularity, and the lithe branches of the elm tapped with muffled fingers against the closed shutters, the dull roar of the surf falling into the pauses. The rain had nearly ceased falling, but a heavy wind was still blowing. Down in the kitchen the maid-servants slumbered fitfully in their chairs, and Luke Varney paced restlessly back and forth before the windows. On a wooden

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settee, with one arm thrown over his head and his face in shadow, Barry Gray lay asleep —at least he breathed heavily, and did not answer when Luke spoke to him twice.

Duke went to the foot of the stairs and listened. Only the sound of the clock, and the faint fall of Leslie Wolcott's slippers, as he walked up and down the hall, came to his ears. He saw, although he did not put his foot on the stairs, the doctor, with his grave, inexplicable face, sitting in the velvet easy-chair, watching and counting the moments, with that unerring instinct which physicians have of death. He saw Mrs. Hargrave, pale and calm, holding her husband's hand—he remembered how cold it was, and that it never, never would grow warm again—and brushing the fair hair back from his temples, and, mayhap, stooping to kiss the weak irresolute mouth, that wore, and always would to his memory, the faint smile, restful and tender, that he saw settle upon it when he had given him his brother's message. And so, with the sound of the clock in his ears, and the faint stir of Leslie Wolcott's slippers on the carpet, he stole softly away, leaving them waiting, waiting!

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A WOMAN'S ERROR.

BY MRS. R. B. EDSON.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER her father went away Lena went and took out, from a little trunk in her bedroom, and which was carefully locked, a little paper of bright-colored worsteds. Unrolling it she spread a slipper pattern, about half wrought, out on her lap, holding her head off to see how it looked, and not quite satisfied with that, laid it across her own little gaiter, and tucking up her skirts a little, contemplated it with a critical eye.

"It will be lovely when those buds are finished, and another green leaf here, and two there," giving it a little loving touch with her finger, "and the ground is filled in. And this is such a rich, glowing maroon—it looks just like velvet—just the shade to bring out the bright colors. I can see just how pleased and surprised dear papa will look." And she paused, with a little half-smile on her lips, and gazed into the glowing coals, and unconsciously there came back to her the picture of him leaning against the mantel, with the little coil of crimson silk clinging to his arm, and the tender light in his eyes, and the flush on his cheek.

And then she started up, and threading her needle, set diligently to work, smiling softly to herself as the delicate buds and soft, velvety leaves grew to perfectness beneath her slender fingers, pausing now and then to hold the work off to admire the effect. Suddenly the little gothic clock on the mantel struck ten. She started up in surprise:

"I wouldn't have believed it was so late!" she exclaimed; and began hurriedly gathering up her worsteds, and folding them away in the paper. "I wouldn't have him see them for the world before I get them done," she said, as she carefully locked them in the trunk again.

Then she remembered a little German legend that she had promised Mollie Sterne to translate for her. She had repeated it to her one day, and she had been so pleased with it that she had offered to write it off for her. It was a simple little story of two peasants who started to travel round the world. One made great preparations for his journey, resolving to have things in readiness for any emergency. He carried thick clothing, for it might be cold, and light clothing for it might be warm. He provided himself with various stores of medicine in case of illness; and then remembering that there might be robbers in the way, had a suit of armor made, for he dared not trust to his good sword alone, for he had resolved to convert his little hut and garden plat into gold, that he might take that also with him.

The other gave a poor neighbor the use of his cottage and garden, and all the milk from two fat kine, while he should be away. He had no gold to carry, and so he needed neither sword nor armor. He dressed himself comfortably, leaving the control of the elements to Providence, in whom he trusted also for the same good health which had been heretofore vouchsafed him.

They set out together, but the first soon fell behind. His armor chafed and fretted him, his clothing and stores weighed him down, and he was in constant fear lest the robbers should come upon him unawares and take all his possessions. The other, light of heart and light of limb, strode fearlessly on his journey, thoroughly enjoying everything he saw each day, happy in the brightness and the sunshine, without ever stopping to wonder if it would be cold or dark on the morrow, or he should be ill, or the plague should destroy his kine, or the flames devour his cottage. And so he journeyed round the world, keeping his face always to the light, and dwelling in perpetual sunshine.

Arrived at home he made inquiries for his fellow-traveller. No one had heard aught of him, and so he started on in pursuit of him. But he had not far to go. Scarce ten leagues away he found him overcome with fatigue; his clothing heavy and soiled with the dirt through which he had been compelled to

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drag it—for he could not carry so much weight on his shoulders—his sword broken at the hilt from having been caught in the wall, where he had hidden to be secure from robbers, and his gold, and his armor, and his medicine weighing him down so that he had no heart for enjoying any of the beautiful sights; indeed, it took him all the time to look out for his burdens; and he had no time to look up to see if the sun was shining, because of his many cares, that kept his eyes always on the earth.

And so Lena opened her little writing-desk and set about the task, thinking, as she described the happy traveller, how much like him Mollie Sterne was, with her bright, cheerful faith in Providence, and the sunshine ever on her face; seeing always the rainbow over the cloud of wrath.

Perhaps there is no employment in which time slips away so unconsciously as in writing, and Lena, absorbed in her work, grew forgetful of the hours. The soft glow of the coals fell across her fair, sunny face, deepening the pretty sea-shell pink in her cheeks, and bronzing the long, heavy curls until they looked like dim gold.

A man—a man with a fair Saxon face—clouded a little now—and heavy chestnut hair and beard, wet and tangled with wind and rain, thought what a pretty picture it was, as he stood holding his breath at the window. The light muslin curtain had fallen a little away, and he could see her distinctly.

"She is alone," he said, turning away, his honest face clouded and perplexed. "What can it mean?"

Dane Hargrave had been lying in a light stupor for the last hour. Suddenly he started up.

"What is that?" he said, the faint reverberations of a bell falling on his ear.

"It is the clock in the belfry tower; it is midnight," Doctor Dinsmore replied.

"Midnight, and he has not come! O Walter! I cannot wait! Luke, tell me again what he said."

"Luke is not here, Mr. Hargrave."

"Celia, you wont mind Luke's coming up once more, will you? I shan't want him again, dear."

She went out to call him. The wind was going out with the tide, and the storm was nearly over. With the first lull of the elements, Leslie had lain down on the carpet by the door, weak and prostrated now that the excitement of the storm was over. He had fallen in a light slumber, and his sister seeing how pale he was did not arouse him, but ran down to the kitchen to call Luke herself. He was not there, but Gray started up from the settee. She recoiled a little at sight of him, which he did not seem to notice, except with a curious little contraction of his beetling brows, which did not add to the attractiveness of his face particularly.

"Where is Luke?" she asked, avoiding his eye.

The girls said, he was here a moment ago, perhaps he had lain down; and they went to his room and called. But there was no answer.

"I cannot wait," she said, nervously, turning to go back. Just as she reached the door Gray said, speaking to one of the women, but loud enough for her to hear:

"He went out half an hour ago. I think he has gone to find Walter Hargrave." And again his brows came together over his eyes.

It was only a moment—two or three at most—that she had been gone, and Doctor Dinsmore's grave face gave no hint of the little scene that had transpired during her absence, and which, despite his imperturbability, perplexed him greatly.

After his wife had left the room he had asked abruptly:

"Doctor, how many minutes shall I live?"

"Thirty perhaps—perhaps ten."

"You don't think he will come?"

"Your brother?"

"Yes, Walter," he whispered, his voice failing.

"I am afraid not—that is in time."

"O, I must tell somebody! I promised I wouldn't, but I did not know then! I have wrote out the whole story—it is in—in—" he pointed towards the hall, but he could not articulate.

The doctor forced a few drops of wine into his mouth, but it failed to revive him. And then Mrs. Hargrave came in. She saw the change instantly, and sprang towards the bed, exclaiming:

"O Dane! O my husband!"

He opened his eyes and smiled faintly on her.

"It was for you, Celia," he whispered, "it was all for you, for O, I loved you so! He said—he forgave—me—Luke—"

"Yes, he forgave you," said Doctor Dinsmore, leaning over him and speaking soothingly. But he need not, for Dane Hargrave's

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ears were forever closed to any sound of earth.

In the meanwhile Lena Hargrave had finished her translation, and found to her surprise that it was past midnight. She began to wonder why her father did not come. He had been gone four hours. She threw a shawl over her and went out. The roar of the surf still came up from the sea, but sounding fainter and further away. The light from Barry's Bluff streamed out clear and white across the refluent waves; and the wind sobbed and moaned faintly, like a child that had exhausted itself with weeping. Here and there a star looked out through the breaking clouds, and low down in the east a waning moon showed faintly through the heavy mist.

The village windows were dark and grim, with never a stir or hint of life. Only in one of them all, and that not in the village, but a little to the right, was there a light visible. She stood some moments watching the lights moving about, with a vague knowledge of the cause. Then with a little sigh she went into the house, saying:

"He will certainly come home now."

She waited a little longer, her eyelids drooping in spite of her anxiety; and then she thought she would lie down a moment, until he came. She had no thought of sleeping—O no; only the fire had gone down, and it was getting chilly, and so she wrapped her shawl about her and laid down. By-and-by, she thought her father came in and asked her for the pocket-book she had seen him put in the drawer. She got it, and he stood by the bed, counting the money—there was just fifty dollars, she remembered—with a white, stony look in his face. Then he put it all back, saying, "You will need it most," and turned to go out. She sprang up in bed, calling, "father, father! come back!" only to find that she had been dreaming, and that she was still alone. The light burned dim, and the windows were already gray with the coming dawn. A sort of vague fear oppressed her; what could it mean? She drew aside the curtains and sat down, waiting for it to grow light. A heavy mist lay over the sea, and only the red eye of the light, like a spectral orb, gleamed sullenly through the fog.

The gray light crept softly into the old Hargrave mansion and fell into little odd corners, and brightened the sombre stillness that brooded like a spell over the place. Fires were kindled, and shutters thrown open, and presently Luke Varney came out with a hushed step, and went to the barn to feed the cattle. He threw open the great doors carefully, still walking with a hushed step as he went back and forth across the great floor, his strong arms filled with hay.

Doctor Dinsmore came out at the front door and walked slowly towards home, a trifle graver perhaps than usual. Possibly he was thinking of Dane Hargrave's secret, and wondering if *she* knew of it, or if it was anything that concerned her; and if it would be better to speak to her about it, or remain silent.

Mrs. Hargrave came into the sitting-room with heavy eyes and bloodless face. The iridiscent gleams were all washed out of the eyes, leaving only a dull, opaque black, that contrasted sharply with the face.

"Leslie," she said, speaking with an evident effort, "I think *you* had better go up there and let them know."

"Why don't you send Gray or Luke? I am not sure as I know the place."

"You can inquire. I had rather you would go; Luke is busy."

"Why, do you suppose, he didn't come down?"

"How should I know?" she asked, impatiently.

"I didn't suppose you did know; but don't you think it very strange?"

"I—I don't know. Why, yes, I suppose it is. Perhaps something happened to keep him—perhaps he didn't care—"

"Celia! don't you know what Luke said? I don't believe a man could be so unfeeling, when his own brother—"

"Leslie, *will* you go?" breaking suddenly in.

"Certainly, if you think it best," putting on his hat.

"Best! Don't you know it has got to be done? How strange you talk!"

"Well, well, I'll go. You'd rather I'd go than to send Gray?" looking back from the door.

"Gray?" with a start. "No, Gray cannot go, I have work for him," she said, in a quieter tone.

The fog had begun to lift from the sea, and here and there a man was moving about the shore looking after their boats. The smoke curled lazily from the chimneys, and one old man sat in the door mending a net. Leslie paused.

"Would you tell me, sir, which of those houses is Walter Hargrave's?" he asked, pointing up the street.

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"The further one—the one with green blinds, and a garden in front. But stop—there's Miss Lena now, coming down the street."

"His daughter?"

"To be sure; and the prettiest girl in Brent, too. Mr. Walter's master proud of her. I reckon you must be a stranger, sir?"

"I have only been in Brent a week, since my brother-in-law has been so much worse."

"Are you Mrs. Hargrave's brother?" the old man said, dropping his net, and coming and leaning on the broken paling.

"Yes sir, I am."

"And how is he—any chance for him, d'ye think?"

"Mr. Hargrave is dead," he answered, in a low voice.

"Dead! Dane Hargrave dead! Lena, Miss Lena, this gentleman says—"

"I heard him, Mr. Reeves," she said, gravely. Then addressing herself to Wolcott, "I was just coming over to the mansion. Did father send you?" lifting her brown eyes shyly to the face of the handsome young stranger, and noting, despite her anxiety, how very different he looked from the young farmers or fishermen that she met in the streets.

"No, Miss Hargrave, your father didn't—"

"Didn't think I would be so foolish as to get nervous about him," she interrupted. "Well, I know it was foolish, but I was not expecting he would stay all night."

"All night! Miss Hargrave, isn't your father at home?"

"At home? No," the color dying out of her face.

"Don't faint, Miss Lena, don't faint. Mother, mother, come here!" And Mr. Reeves started towards the house in great excitement.

"I shall not faint, Mr. Reeves," she said, putting her hand out to the paling, and leaning on it slightly. Then to Wolcott, "How long ago did father leave?"

"He never came!"

She looked at him an instant with a look in her eyes he never forgot—a terrified, imploring look, and then melted like a snow-wreath from the broken paling, and lay white and still on the pale yellow sand, at his feet. He took her up in his arms and carried her into the house, her bronze-brown curls falling across his breast, and blowing against his face. In that moment something flashed across his consciousness that this girl was, somehow, inwoven with his destiny. The impression was a little painful, as if there were more of sorrow than sweetness in the fateful union.

Mr. Reeves had succeeded in finding "mother," and the good dame quickly administered such simple restoratives as were at hand, and Lena soon revived. The girl was naturally strong, and not at all given to fainting, but the long vigil, and the anxiety, had wrought her nervous system to a high state of excitement. It all came back to her instantly when she opened her eyes, but such a sickening fear, such a nameless terror came with it, that she tried several times before her lips could syllable a word. Leslie saw her struggles, and sitting down beside her, said, in a low, soothing tone, holding down his own rising excitement:

"I presume we shall soon unravel the mystery, Miss Hargrave. Something of which we do not happen to know, now, probably has kept him. Do not suffer yourself to be alarmed yet. I will run round and make a few inquiries, and return and let you know."

Lena was very white and still; she did not move, or cry out, only shivered as if with sudden cold. When he arose to go she reached out her hand with a motion as if to hold him back. A quick, electric thrill—now hot, now cold—ran from his head to his feet, he sat down weak and trembling. Was it some prescience of the days to come?

Leslie Wolcott saw a group of men on the shore, and hastened towards them. As he went, the chapel bell rang out sharp and clear on the still air. It rose and fell, and floated out over the harbor bar, and was lost in the rising fog. It came back again, faint and soft—hovered over the little town—and fell with a sweet cadence into the silence of the forest below.

The men were talking eagerly as he came up.

"What is it?" he said, a sudden fear striking him.

"Nothing much, sir," said one of the men, "only Joe Davitt's boat broke from her moorings last night, and has drifted out to sea."

Leslie stooped down and looked at the bit of rope left on the stake to which the boat had been fastened.

"It was *cut* off," he said, looking up, after a moment.

The men looked in each other's faces, and Joe Davitt, elbowing his way through the crowd, exclaimed:

"Let *me* see, young stranger. If anybody

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has set my boat adrift a-purpose, he'd better not let me know that he did it!"

"Men," said Leslie, "there is one of your neighbors missing, or rather his family do not know of his whereabouts. I came to inquire if any of you had seen, or knew aught of Walter Hargrave?"

"Walter Hargrave!" was ejaculated from lip to lip. "Since when?" Joe Davitt asked, straightening up.

"Well, say eight or nine o'clock last evening."

One after another shook their heads slowly, and Joe Davitt's boat was forgotten in this greater interest.

"Mebbe he took Joe's boat to go down to the Bluff," suggested one.

"How long do you think a boat could have lived last night?" was the contemptuous rejoinder.

And so, amid suggestions and speculations, Leslie left them and hurried home to see if, by any possibility, he had been there since he left. He met Luke coming out of the yard with a troubled face.

"Heard anything?" he asked, excitedly.

"No. He hasn't been at home. I came back hoping he had been here during my absence."

Luke shook his head sadly.

"What's up down to the shore?" he asked.

"Joe Davitt's boat was *cut* from her moorings last night."

Luke stood staring at him for a full minute, and then he turned abruptly, and walked rapidly towards the shore, and Leslie went in to inform his sister of the strange affair. When he told her about the boat, she caught it at once.

"He went over to the Bluff, undoubtedly," she said; "he is a great friend of Morey's, which is fortunate, as he hasn't many friends."

"Who? the light-keeper?"

"Yes—the most disagreeable man I ever saw. I believe I utterly hate him!" a tinge of red coming into her pallid face.

"Couldn't Hargrave have gone by land easier, if he had had occasion to visit this Morey? The men on the shore—the old fishermen—say that a boat couldn't live in such a sea as it was last night."

"Well, perhaps the boat *didn't* live," she said, in a low voice.

"I don't believe he took the boat," he said, after a little pause, rising and walking towards the door.

"What *do* you believe?" She spoke, sharply and impatiently, as if she somehow took comfort in the supposition, and was annoyed at his opposition.

He turned and looked at her. He did not know why it should, but at that instant the sound of the voices he had heard in the passage seemed to rise and die away, just as he had heard them the evening before; and Gray's voice—he was sure it was Gray's voice, now—seemed to speak in his ear—it was so distinct, "*it will be soon enough when he comes back.*" Why should that come to him then? he wondered; and giving himself a little shake to be sure he was not dreaming, he answered, perplexedly:

"I am sure I don't know what to believe, Celia, it is so strange."

"Why do you go out again, Leslie? it is so lonesome here, with *him* lying up there."

"I will not be gone long, I promised—" He paused abruptly, reddening a little, then added, "I promised to let them know if he had been here."

He could not have told what it was that made him hesitate about mentioning Lena to his sister, but something seemed to stand before him and warn him. He found her in an agony of grief and terror at the mysterious disappearance of her father. Every house in the village had been visited, and some had mounted horses and ridden out into the outskirts to make inquiries, but no one had seen the missing man since dark of the evening before. Only one hope remained, that he had, for some unaccountable reason, gone to Barry's Bluff. Half a score volunteered to go, but Lena insisted upon going herself. It was two miles by the road, but much less by water, and Lena decided in favor of the boat.

Leslie had not the most remote idea of going until after Lena had taken her seat in the boat. He could not have told what it was, but something in her face drew him, and pushing Luke aside, just as he was stepping over the side of the boat, he sprang in and pushed off. He heard a little murmur of voices—whether of surprise or disapproval he did not know, only one thing coming distinctly to his ear, in Joe Davitt's deep voice:

"The rope *was* cut, boys; the stranger was right!"

It did not seem to Leslie as if there was any weight to the oars. The boat shot ahead like an arrow, yet he was not conscious of effort. The shore and bay faded away; the little town—the wood—the distant hills, and the bristling rocks, all vanished from sight,

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and he went sailing on, and on, in a winged chariot, over enchanted seas—the two—only the two in all the universe of space. How many times he thought of that morning, long afterwards, with a mingled sweetness and pain.

Mollie Sterne was a firm believer in dreams, and signs, and warnings; and in the pauses of the night, over and over again, she had heard the deathwatch's steady beat over her head, and had said to Hugh, even before the sharp clang of the bell had floated out over the sea, that "somebody had died last night."

But she was not prepared for the look of unutterable sorrow and despair in the face of her darling, when, in answer to Leslie's eager inquiry, she said, "Walter Hargrave had not been there for a week."

"What is it, Pretty?" she said, coming down to the edge of the boat, and reaching out her arms lovingly towards her, as if she would take her away from all the sorrow and pain.

"Father! O Mollie!" she gasped, her lips growing whiter and whiter; "O Mollie, where *is* my father!"

Hugh Morey suddenly swooped down upon the boat, and lifted her in his arms as he would an infant, and strode up to the house with her, murmuring low, broken sentences in her ear, as one would to a frightened child.

Coming up together more slowly, Leslie made a brief statement of the case to Mollie Sterne, whose bright face was clouded with sympathy and sorrow.

"He has told you?" she asked, looking at Mollie with set, stony eyes.

"Yes, pet. O my darling! don't look at me so!" Mollie said, beseechingly.

"Mollie, how can I live without my father?" the same hard, dry look in the brown eyes.

"*I* will be your father, little girl," Hugh Morey said, in a voice as soft and tender as a woman's, smoothing the tangled curls with his rough hand. "I know I am a coarse, rough old fellow to care for such a pretty blossom as you, my Pretty, and men say old Hugh is gruff and hard, but there is nothing but softness and tenderness in my heart for my little Lena," his voice faltering a little as he stooped over her, still stroking her hair tenderly.

"Dear old Hugh!" she said. Her lips trembled, the stony look in her eyes melted, and she broke into a passion of tears, the first she had shed since the terrible fear had come into her heart.

When she grew quieter, Hugh asked Leslie if there was no trace that they could get hold of.

"Only Davitt's boat was cut loose and is missing."

"A boat!" Hugh exclaimed, with a strange look at Molly. "What time did he leave home?"

"A little before nine o'clock."

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was never such an excitement known before in the little sea-coast town, as that consequent on the mysterious disappearance of Walter Hargrave. Everybody in Brent felt a personal interest in the matter; even the widow of Dane Hargrave, whom everybody knew had not spoken to him for twenty years, offered a magnificent reward to any one who could bring any positive knowledge of his whereabouts, whether he were living or dead. People wondered, imagined and surmised, until conjecture was exhausted, and were still no nearer the solution of the mystery than before.

About two weeks after the disappearance, and while the mystery was still fresh in the minds of the people, a coasting vessel picked up a boat drifting bottom up, and towed it into Brent. What should it prove to be but Joe Davitt's lost "Polly Jane!" This revived the interest, confirming, however, in the minds of most people, the suspicion that had been slowly gaining ground, that for some reason which they could never know, Walter Hargrave had taken the boat, and been wrecked, doubtless before he reached the harbor bar; and there was a sort of furtive watch kept up all along the coast for weeks, for his body, but wherever it was, on the land or under the sea, it came not to the shores of Brent.

But Mollie Sterne, bright, hopeful Mollie Sterne, remembered the strange vision she had seen through the mist and darkness of that wild night, and had faith that the guardian angel who had guided him over the terrible harbor bar, had guided him also to peace and safety. For Mollie believed just as firmly as she believed in her own existence, that the man she saw lying in the bottom of that boat was Walter Hargrave, and it went far to strengthen her faith in the supernatural, and she dreamed dreams with increased relish, but they were all of such a cheerful character, that she had nothing to do but grow brighter and merrier over them. Mollie

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and Hugh would gladly have kept Lena with them; but the pretty little cottage where *they* had dwelt together, the books, the pictures, and the flowers which they had enjoyed in company, called her, like so many voices, back to their silent companionship. Indeed, everything seemed to have found voice, talking continually of him—always of him.

Everybody in Brent pitied and sympathized with the desolate girl, but she had never made many intimate friends, and could not all at once accept the well-meant friendships that were proffered her. She shrank from their familiar mention of her sorrow. Their well-meant sympathy seemed a sort of sacrilege to her. It was *her* grief; why should everybody bandy it about, making common staple of it?

She had been to her Uncle Dane's funeral—been like one walking in their sleep, so incapable of thought, it almost seemed of motion—save in an unconscious, automatic way—had she been. Only one thing out of it all, came back to her out of all the dreamy pageant; and that seemed more like some vague, sweet spell of intoxication, than anything belonging to the real, tangible experiences which she had hitherto known. Only one thing—only one memory coming into the darkness, and gloom, and desolation—a memory subtile and sweet as the breath of April flowers; a memory of a dark, bright face, instinct with sympathy and tenderness, though the lips said but little; a face that drew her away from herself, away from earth—ay, even from heaven—drew her surely and irresistibly as the needle attracts the pole.

It came to her—this memory—when she lay awake in the long silences, with only the dull boom of the surf sounding in her ears; it came unbidden and walked beside her among her flowers, it fluttered out from between the leaves as she turned them dreamily in her fugitive readings, and hovered, a sweet, intangible presence, about all her common life.

There were some changes made at the old Hargrave mansion after the death of its master. Luke Varney had left the establishment, and bought a little farm on the outskirts of the village, half covered with huge rocks, and half with bayberry, sweet-fern and brambles. Luke, however, did not expect to make his fortune out of it, and was in no immediate danger of being disappointed. He had some nice theories about scientific farming, and thought this a good field of operation; as it most certainly was, science having it all its own way, with little help or hindrance from nature. There was a little cottage, too, with a straight up and down look about it, and a high picket fence run out in front-like feelers, wherein Luke proposed to experiment in domestic economy. Not that he intended setting up a permanent branch of this miserable abortion of housekeeping, but merely a temporary accommodation, while he was coquetting with science, and Mollie Sterne was coquetting with *him*. Indeed, one of the chief attractions of the place had been its availability for operations in the latter department of cultivation, as it was almost immediately contiguous to the Bluff.

Gray, too, had gone away from Brent. He went away rather suddenly—at least it was sudden to most people—about two weeks after the death of Dane Hargrave. It was not positively known where he had gone, though there were rumors that he had shipped on board the coaster that had towed in Joe Davitt's boat. Somebody had heard the captain say he was short of hands, and somebody else had heard Gray say he "was sick of Brent and meant to see a little of the world outside the harbor bar." Neither was it positively known that Mrs. Hargrave had favored his going, though it was remarked that she seemed in better spirits, and not so strange and nervous after he went away.

One day, accompanied by her brother, she called to see Lena. She was very friendly and pleasant after the first embarrassment passed off, for neither of them could quite forget the coldness that had been between the families. Mrs. Hargrave seemed very anxious to be on friendly terms, and Lena was fascinated by the charm and elegance of her manner, and the delicate attention, and evident interest she took in her. There were only they two women left who bore the name of Hargrave, why should they be enemies? Lena argued. There had been some trouble between her father and her Uncle Dane, that had resulted in coldness and estrangement, but what its precise nature was she had never known—probably she never should now—why should she perpetuate the feud while ignorant of its nature? And so she met Mrs. Hargrave's advances with a pretty sort of shy pleasure, that made her very charming.

Mrs. Hargrave was delighted with her, and talked of her all the way home, but Leslie was unusually silent, answering her questions

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only in monosyllables, and then quite at random. At last she quite lost patience.

"Leslie Wolcott!" she exclaimed, "you are the most perverse fellow that ever lived! I went up there at your desire—"

"Did I ask you to go, Celia?" he interrupted, suddenly.

"Well, no; not in so many words. But you know, Leslie, that you stimulated my interest in the girl, by a thousand little adroit ways. There has not been a day since—since," she hesitated, and looked away from the steady gaze bent so intently upon her. "For mercy sake, Leslie Wolcott," she exclaimed, "turn away those strange mesmeric eyes! Do you know, that I half fancy that, *at will*, you could fascinate or charm one, so as to hold them despite their reason or better judgment. There is something a little uncanny about you, Leslie, did you know?"

He smiled; a dreamy, absent smile, lighting up his pale olive face with a sort of supernatural beauty. The thin nostrils quivered and dilated, the lips—fine and red—were melting, tender, irresistible.

"Leslie!" sharply. He gave a little start, the whole expression of his face changing.

"Well, Celia?" laughing a little.

"I want to warn you. Never look at Lena Hargrave as you were looking then—remember!" A fiery red surged in his face. "Because," she went on, "she is one of those sensitive natures that are easily wrought upon, and I am not a going to have her bewitched," laughing at her own earnestness. He gave her a queer look—half vexation, half amusement.

"*What is it?*" *she said, a little uneasily.*

"I was only thinking how strange it was that you had taken upon yourself the championship of this girl, only when death had sundered the only tie that could have made it obligatory."

She grew a little paler, but answered promptly:

"There was no need before. I *have* a right to love this girl, *now*, and nobody shall stand between!" she added, almost fiercely.

"Did *he* stand between—her father?"

A sudden flush came into her cheek, and died out, leaving a ghastly whiteness in its stead, but she did not speak. Leslie Wolcott sat motionless, regarding her fixedly. All at once, as if by intuition, he saw how it was. No one had ever told him—no hint had ever been dropped that intimated, ever so remotely, such an idea, but he knew instantly, by some strange psychology, that his sister had loved Walter Hargrave. How remotely, he could not tell; neither did he know if she had loved his brother, whom she married; only one thing stood out plain and clear to his consciousness; that, at some time, she had loved Walter Hargrave with the one passion of her life. She was so much older than him that he knew very little of her early life, she having been ten years old when her mother married his father. He only remembered her as a proud, ambitious girl, with strong passions and unbending will. He was but a child when she came North—they were natives of Baltimore—to visit some of her father's relatives. She never returned, but was married some time in the course of a year, he believed, as near as he could remember.

Lena Hargrave had always known Doctor Dinsmore, or rather she knew there was such a man, from seeing him ride past, and from frequent mention of his name by the townspeople, but she had never had any personal acquaintance with him. Indeed he seemed something quite formidable to her imagination, with his learning, and wisdom, and grave dignity. And then he was forty years old—almost; which to a girl of nineteen seemed something quite patriarchal. To be sure, her father was forty-six, but she never thought of *him* as being old, he had always been young to her—he always would be now, for the dead never grow old! No one ever thinks of the little child whose life went out on his bosom, as being old, and wrinkled, and gray; time may do all this for those who live; but those who have *fallen asleep are touched with the* seal of perpetual youth.

It was, therefore, with a little perturbed flutter of the heart that Lena saw Doctor Dinsmore drive up to the cottage, and quietly alight, and secure his horse to a post as if he intended to make a visit. As he turned to come up the walk, something—perhaps some chance expression of his face—brought back something which her father had once said of him. Referring to some one who had abused his trust in them, he said: "Doctor Dinsmore is the *weakest* strong man I ever knew—that is, the weakest through his affections. One that he loves can do anything with him, except make him do wrong himself; *that*, nothing can do. He is a perfect Samson in strength and shrewdness of character, but Love is the Delilah that binds him."

It came back to her then with a new sense,

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and for the first time in her life it came into her thoughts to wonder why he had never married. The thought embarrassed her a trifle as she opened the door at his summons. But his manner—grave and quiet, with a touch of gentleness in it—reassured her at once. The flutter died out of her heart, and her pulses grew calm, and a feeling of repose and rest enveloped her, such as she had not known since that terrible night. It seemed, as she sat there conversing quietly with him, as if she had been in one long fevered sleep ever since. It did not annoy her that *he* should speak of her father, it seemed right and natural that he should; and to no one, not even to Mollie Sterne, had she felt so free to speak of him, as she did to him. She had told him, as she had never any one else, all the little incidents of that last evening—all he had said—how he had looked, and the little strangeness in his manner, which she thought now was presentiment, else why should he have left all the money, and taken only her mother's picture? She did not know how it happened, but before she was fairly aware, she found herself telling all her circumstances; how that the fifty dollars in that pocket-book was all she had, save the little cottage which she was quite sure she could never, never sell. She supposed, though, she should have to go away from Brent, there was nothing she could do there—indeed, she did not know what she could do anywhere. It made her sick and giddy to think of it, as she did sometimes through such long, long nights that seemed as if they never would end.

He was standing beside her and with a sudden impulse which he could not resist, he touched her hair tenderly with his hand.

"Poor little girl," he said, "if only I could help you!"

A painful flush dyed her forehead, and she stammered:

"I am not soliciting charity, I only told you because—because, well, I don't know why, unless it was because I couldn't help it."

"You misunderstand me," he said, hastily, his own face flushing. "Let me tell you what I meant. But in order to do so I shall have to touch upon an unpleasant subject. I had not intended telling you, as I find you know nothing which can throw any light on the matter." She had not been sensible of it before, but it flashed suddenly through her mind how his cautious inquiries had unconsciously led her to a revelation of her circumstances, her thoughts, and her feelings. But he quickly resumed: "You know that there had been an estrangement between your father and his brother, Dane Hargrave?"

"O yes; father spoke of it very freely to me. I think he regretted it very much, and would gladly have sought a reconciliation, but Uncle Dane would give him no opportunity."

"Yes, I know. But do you happen to know the origin of the difficulty? The case stood when I came to Brent just as it did up to four weeks ago."

"I think there was some opposition to my mother," she said, in a low voice, as if disliking to speak of it.

"*That* was your grandfather's caprice. I have heard that story scores of times. And yet, if I remember rightly, the breach was nearly healed when he died."

"Yes; at least so papa thought until after the reading of the will, which disinherited him. I don't know, but I always judged that was the beginning of the estrangement."

"Exactly. Well, now I will tell you what I started to, to explain why I said I wished I could help you. I was with Mr. Hargrave the last four hours of his life, and witnessed the strange anxiety he manifested to see your father. *If* he could have seen him, I am convinced that you would not have to leave Brent because of poverty, at least. There was something to be forgiven—some wrong he had done your father, the memory of which haunted his dying moments. I can, of course, only conjecture its character, for he held to the hope that your father would come, until he was too far gone to reveal it to any one else, even if he would. But there was one thing—and I don't mind saying now, that I hoped you might hold some clue to it, and that is why I came in—that has perplexed and haunted me ever since. It was just before he died, and he could only speak with difficulty. I was alone with him when he asked me how many minutes he could live. Upon my naming a very brief period he exclaimed, 'I *must* tell somebody! I promised not to, but I cannot die with this on my soul. I have written out the whole story—tell Walter he will find it in—in—' He could get no further, but tried to point, I thought, towards the hall. His wife came in, and he lived but a few moments, and only speaking once more, some loving word to her.

"There," he said, smiling slightly, "have I exonerated myself? You see how it is, that I would like to help you, by explaining this mystery, which *I* think would relieve you

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from embarrassment as regards pecuniary matters."

Lena turned impulsively and touched her lips to the hand that rested on her chair.

"Forgive me!" she cried, her eyes filling with tears. "O, if you only could help me—in that way! But it is too late now, and I don't know after all as I care now *he* is gone," breaking into a low, soft weeping.

Basil Dinsmore blushed like a girl when she touched his hand with her lips, and a new look came into his face, that for the moment transfigured it. But when she began weeping he spoke to her gravely, but tenderly, and told her that she was exhausting her nervous system, which was already weak and overstrained, and that she must really try to compose herself, or he should, he feared, have to come again; and that time in his official capacity.

She looked up, smiling faintly through her tears.

"Doctor Dinsmore," she said, "I never had a physician in my life; don't try to frighten me."

"Are physicians such ogres then, that the bare contemplation alarms you?"

"They *were*."

"By which I am to infer," he replied, laughing, "that you find them only very common sort of clay, upon nearer inspection."

"I don't mean that," she said, earnestly.

"What is it, then?" his voice unconsciously eager.

"I don't know, only that I am not afraid of you as—as I used to be," she stammered. A rare smile illumined his face, making it for the moment positively beautiful.

"I hope, Miss Hargrave, that you never will be troubled by any such ill-founded fears again," he said. "I would like to be a friend to Walter Hargrave's little girl—may I?"

"Certainly, Doctor Dinsmore, if you care for the friendship of a poor little orphan girl, like me. As for myself, I shall feel only too honored by the friendship of so wise and good a man as report says Doctor Dinsmore is." There was just a shadow of courtly dignity—Hargrave dignity, people called it—perceptible in her tone and manner.

A slight shadow of vexation crossed his face, but he replied:

"I think report says *something* very much the same of Miss Hargrave, with this addition, that she is beautiful, accomplished and—proud!"

Lena laughed—a little, soft, ringing laugh, that set one to thinking of the faint tinkle of far-away silver bells.

"I am vanquished," she exclaimed, cordially extending her hand. "I am convinced two such very superior people ought to know each other."

Again that rare smile softened his face. He took the little soft hand extended to him, held it an instant in both of his, saying, "good-by, my child," in what he considered his most fatherly manner. And all day, as he rode through the town, his reason and judgment kept asserting that it was only a perfectly safe, elderly sort of an interest he felt in the girl, that made him think of her so often. I don't know, I am sure, why they should have insisted upon it so stoutly; his heart certainly offered no opposition, but fluttered and trembled like the veriest coward, so that there was no necessity of the repeated asseverations with which he continually assured himself.

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A WOMAN'S ERROR.: CHAPTER V. CHAPTER VI.
MRS. R B EDSON
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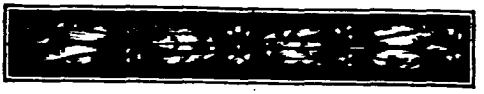

A WOMAN'S ERROR.

BY MRS. R. B. EDSON.

CHAPTER V.

THREE weeks ran on—one, two, three, four more—and it was the first week in June. Lena still lingered in the little cottage, which it seemed harder than ever to leave, now that the roses and syringas were wooing her with their unfolding sweetness. She had met Doctor Dinsmore several times, and once he had stopped a moment at the gate, when she was tying up some long sprays of honeysuckle that were trailing on the ground, but he had never been in the house since that day. At first she expected him, but latterly she had not thought so much of it. To tell the truth, she could think of nothing very distinctly. She seemed to live in a sort of dreamy spell, thought and feeling alike torpid. She grew white and ethereal-looking, as if the body was gradually exhaling, leaving only the spirit. She didn't sleep much nights, but lay awake thinking, but always in such a helpless, aimless sort of a way, that it only disturbed and perplexed her, without helping her to any definite resolution.

Leslie Wolcott came in almost daily. He had so many errands, either to bring, or borrow books, or help her in her garden, or bring some little dainty which his sister sent to tempt Lena's delicate appetite, that he really could not help it. For a little while he struggled against the fascination of her presence, and he yielded to the sweet enchantment, and lived in Eden three sweet, swift weeks, and then came an awakening.

He had been down to Rose Cottage, all the long, sweet June morning. The thrushes and orioles had filled the air with tender melody, and the heavy sweetness of the syringas made one almost giddy with their perfume. His sensitive temperament absorbed and rioted in this excess of sweetness. I am afraid he forgot his sister's warning, looking into the fair face of Lena Hargrave; forgot, alas! another face which he ought to have remembered. But the charm was so intoxicating, and the affinity so perfect, that he shut his eyes to danger, and gave himself up soul and body to the bewildering fascination of the hour. Perhaps Lena was insensible to everything outside the charmed circle where the orioles circled and flashed through the orchard closes. I do not think, at least, that she was conscious of a want or wish which the moment did not fill. Life seemed, in that hour of perfect abandon, a beautiful golden vista opening into heaven.

But all at once the bewildering illusion was broken. Mollie Sterne—bright, cheerful, practical Mollie Sterne—came upon the scene, and the vision dissolved and exhaled like the dew on blossoming clover.

Mollie had her own theory concerning Leslie Wolcott. I don't know as, generally speaking, she was a believer in the doctrine of metempsychosis, but in this particular instance she was very firm in the faith. She believed that Wolcott had been, in some former period of existence, a subtle and beautiful serpent, and now he had taken on the form of a handsome, agreeable man, with all the peculiar fascination that belonged to his previous period of existence. She believed, too, that he was in some way a sort of vampire, and ascribed Lena's failing health to some uncanny influence which he exerted over her.

She did not understand those subtile affinities that govern us so much more than we know; or have any faith in the unconscious attractions and repulsions, that you and I know are continually affecting us, but do not know how much, and call it visionary to try to determine. We feel the sweet, mesmeric thrill when we come *en rapport* with some congenial soul, but we understand but dimly the mysterious laws that govern the soul—the unexplainable power of attraction, that is perpetually striving to harmonize the antagonisms of Nature, and which we all feel more or less acutely, according to the fineness and sensitiveness of our own natures.

It was therefore with a little secret thrill of

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pleasure that Mollie saw Wolcott take his leave; the evil spirit was exorcised for that day, at least, for she had come prepared to take Lena home with her for the day. Not that she disliked Leslie Wolcott particularly, only that she had got the notion, somehow, that he was accountable for the strange way into which her darling had fallen. She loved Lena Hargrave with the full strength of her warm, generous heart, and it grieved her sorely that she would persist in staying alone at Rose Cottage, when she would so gladly have shared her own home with her, and felt herself the debtor even then.

"Never mind, Mollie," Hugh had said, when she poured her trouble in his ear, "we will keep an eye over her, and maybe when trouble, or sickness, or disappointment comes, she will turn to us. She couldn't turn to truer hearts, or those who would love her better, though she might to grander folk. But it's only natural that she should turn to her own sort. The Kents—do you mind, Mollie?—were high-blooded, and the Hargraves were gentlemen born; and there was never a prouder aristocrat lived under a king, than old Squire Hargrave was."

When Leslie Wolcott left Rose Cottage he walked slowly through the village, yet seeing nothing. The spell was not yet dissipated, you knew by the dreamy smile that glorified his face with its unearthly beauty, and the melting sweetness of the mobile lips. Suddenly he paused with a dim consciousness that somebody had called to him. He looked round but there was no one near. He turned to go on, and again some one called. He looked up; he was just opposite the post-office, the mail was just in, and the postmaster was busy sorting the letters.

"Did you call to me, Mr. Hervey?" he asked, pausing on the threshold.

The postmaster looked up, bowed, and shook his head, and went on with his task.

"O!" he said, just as he was turning away, "here's something for you, Wolcott," tossing two letters on the counter.

Wolcott took them up, looked at one, muttered "business," and put it in his pocket; then he turned the other over, giving a sudden start as if he had received some sort of a shock, a little shiver running over him despite the warmth of the morning. The dreamy smile had faded quite out of his face now, and his lips were cold and hard.

Mrs. Hargrave heard him go up to his room as she sat at her sewing. By-and-by when dinner was ready she went up and called him but he did not come down. Some two hours after, he startled her by the white, haggard face he put in at the sitting-room door. There were dark rings under the eyes, and the heavy black hair fell damp and matted over his forehead.

"Good heavens, Leslie!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet, "you are ill; why didn't you tell me?"

"Nonsense, Celia, I am not ill, only one of my nervous attacks. I am going out to the post-office; have you any commands?"

For answer she went and took him by the arm and led him into the room. She saw then how weak he was, and how his hand trembled.

"There," she said, drawing him down on the sofa beside her, "you will not go out of this house, Leslie Wolcott, with such a face as that."

He leaned over and laid his face on her shoulder without speaking. She brushed the heavy, damp hair away from his forehead, and laid her own cheek against it caressingly. His chest heaved, and his breath came and went convulsively, as if he were struggling to hold back a sob. After a little he lay passively quiet, her fingers still stroking his hair with steady, soothing touch.

"Celia," he said, without raising his head, "I shall remember this when I am away, and bless you for it."

"Away—you are not going away, Leslie?"

"I leave for Baltimore to-morrow night. I have stayed too long already. Curry only took my place for a month, and I have been away nearly three, Laurence & Co. inform me. I had no idea it had been so long until they mentioned it," something of the old dreamy look coming into his face.

"I am so sorry, Leslie," Mrs. Hargrave said. "I am sure I don't know how I shall get on without you, it is so lonely here now. Why need you go back at all? I have enough for both."

"You forget Agnes Carroll, Celia—you forget that I am bound. I had a letter from her this morning."

She turned and tried to look in his face, but he kept it turned away.

"I am afraid *you* had forgotten it, too, Leslie. What does Miss Carroll say to so tardy a lover?"

"O, she did not complain, she is too proud for that; besides, she has the most perfect faith in me—I only wish I had as much in-

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myself—I only wish I was worthy of it."

"Now, Leslie, you are morbid. *I* have faith in you, and I think I understand you better than most any one else."

"I hope better than I do. I tell you, Celia, Leslie Wolcott is a perfect enigma to *me*. I think sometimes I belong to quite another order of beings from the men and women I see daily. *They* have only to will and *do*, but I, what *I* will, that I do not. I am not only the toy of the elements, but the lawful prey of all the mysterious forces that sweep unseen through the realms of being. Sometimes, when I am in a philosophical mood, I sit down and try to analyze this strange compound, but the problem invariably staggers me."

"You *are* different from most people, I admit, Leslie. But that does not necessarily make you worse. You are gifted with a peculiarly fine, sensitive organism, that, like an æolian harp, responds to the lightest breath that sweeps its chords."

"Celia, if there were no impure and miasmal airs!"

She shuddered a little, but did not reply. After a little while she said:

"I wish you and Agnes would be married this summer, Leslie, and come and live with me."

"Married!" he echoed, with a start.

"Certainly, is there anything surprising in it? I believe you have been engaged to Agnes Carroll near three years, haven't you?"

"Don't ask *me!*" a quiver of impatience in his voice. "Don't you know that I am incapable of taking note of time?"

"But you must remember that she is not. I think she loves you, and that her strong, practical sense would be a fine poise to your flightiness. You need some such sort of ballast to keep you from flying off into space."

"There is no danger of Agnes Carroll's ever rising off the earth, at least. You don't think there would be any danger that the cords would wear and fret, Celia?"

"Not if they were of gold," she said, significantly.

"Don't golden fetters ever chafe, I wonder?" he said, as if speaking to himself, as he arose to go out.

A sudden pallor overspread the face of Mrs. Hargrave, and she put her hand to her heart as if in swift pain, but he was too busy with his own thoughts to notice. Three days after, Leslie Wolcott left Brent. Mrs. Hargrave heard that Lena Hargrave was quite ill. She went up that afternoon and found her flushed and hot, with strong symptoms of fever. Yet she insisted that she was not ill, and seemed vexed that any one should think so. She talked a good deal—sometimes a little incoherently, Mrs. Hargrave thought. But in all that she said, she made no mention of Leslie Wolcott. Perhaps she did not know he had gone, and so Mrs. Hargrave said:

"You were away when Leslie called, and so he left his adieus with me."

"I thought he had gone," she said, absently.

"Yes, he went three days ago. He has a situation in some sort of wholesale business in Baltimore, which precluded the possibility of his staying longer. And besides, there was another reason why he should go."

Lena looked up inquiringly, a little flutter at her heart.

"His *fiancee*, Miss Agnes Carroll, resides there. I don't suppose you knew—Leslie was never inclined to speak of it—but he has been engaged to Miss Carroll several years. She is an elegant an accomplished woman, besides being quite wealthy, and I consider Leslie a very fortunate man," she concluded, with a keen look at the half-averted face.

But if she had fancied to make any discovery there, she was mistaken. The face that looked out of the window at the long line of sandy shore, with its slowly receding tide, was as blank and expressionless as that shore itself. She tried to speak, but a heavy hand seemed pressed upon her lips. Her silence passed for stoicism and indifference, and Mrs. Hargrave soon changed the subject, with a little feeling of relief that she had so received it. A little fear, that was not fairly a suspicion, had crossed her mind that she might have had something to do with Leslie's strange agitation that day. But now she was satisfied that it was, as he had said, "only one of his nervous attacks." She feared, besides, that Leslie did not care for Agnes Carroll quite as much as he ought, taking all the advantages of the alliance into consideration.

CHAPTER VI.

LUKE VARNEY, going home from the village in the duskiness of the summer twilight, saw Lena Hargrave sitting at the window, her head lying upon her crossed hands, and her face turned a little towards the street.

"Good evening, Miss Lena," he said, pausing at the gate.

No answer. The motionless, statue-like

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silence struck a chill to his heart. Suppose the girl was dead!—people did die as strangely sometimes. He unbolted the gate, and walked up the path, a curious feeling of awe coming over him. He came close up to her; her eyes were wide open, but the lids did not quiver or relax as he bent down and called her name softly. He lifted her hand, but it lay limp and nerveless in his grasp. Then he turned and walked out of the yard, and swiftly down the street. Fifteen minutes afterwards he stood looking down upon her as she lay white and insensible on her couch, with Doctor Dinsmore counting the almost imperceptible pulse in the nerveless wrist, with a white, anxious face. Presently he looked up, with a slight sigh of relief.

"Make a fire, and put on some water," he said, speaking in a low, rapid tone, "and then take my horse and bring Mrs. Sterne here within twenty minutes. I think you can do it in that time—you are not to spare the horse, you understand."

"Yes, I understand," walking away with rapid strides.

When Mollie Sterne, excited and trembling, came into the room two minutes short of the specified time, Doctor Dinsmore still stood motionless by the couch, holding the slender, passive wrist.

Mollie gave him one swift, imploring glance. He understood and bowed gravely.

"Yes, I think there is hope; she breathes freer, and the strong tension of the cords has relaxed somewhat, and the lids have closed over the eyes. If you will get some warm water we will try to get her limbs to a rather more life-like temperature."

It was well nigh midnight ere they relaxed their attentions, and then she lay in a sort of death-like trance, motionless and white as the pillows she pressed. But her breath, though faint and weak, came regularly, and the circulation, which had been almost entirely suspended, resumed its wonted flow. The limbs grew warm, and the set, rigid look passed out of her face, but still there was not a flutter of the eyelids, or motion of the lips. The passive hands still fell nerveless upon the white counterpane, and only for the faint breathing, one might have believed her a marble woman. For the first time since he entered the house Doctor Dinsmore sat down, yet never turning his eyes from the insensible form, or losing the slightest change in expression or respiration. Mollie Sterne moved noiselessly about the room, coming every few minutes to the bedside to listen to the faint breathing, with a sad, awed face. Out in the porch Luke Varney passed slowly back and forth, his straw hat lying on the floor, and his tangled chestnut hair pushed carelessly back from the white, damp forehead. The same sad, awed look was on his face, also, and though there was no stir or sound, he paused unconsciously every now and then to listen, holding his breath, as if even that might mar the silence.

Out in the garden the roses rioted in sweetness, and the soft summer air stirred with languorous breath the creamy petals of the syringas. The waning moon threw long shadows across the dewy sward and the white, still path. And so the long, silent hours went by, and the dawn crept softly out of the east, and over the sea, and up the cool, dripping sands to the little town. Then, and not till then, did Doctor Dinsmore turn his face away from that of the motionless girl. There was but little change in her yet, and whether she would ever awake from this lethargic sleep, or whether it would pass into another sleep, more silent and stirless still, he could not determine. But he had other patients, whose claims upon him could not be evaded.

"You will stay about the place, while I am away," he said, to Luke Varney, as he came out, "and come for me instantly if there is any change."

"Do you think there is any chance for her, doctor?" Luke asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes, a chance. But she is utterly prostrated. Her nervous system has been in a morbid, unnatural condition for weeks. The long tension has given way, and there is not vitality enough about her to rally. Whether there will be—whether her physical strength is equal to the demand, we have only to wait and see." And with another injunction to promptness in notifying him of any alteration in her condition, he went softly down the garden path, pausing once to look up to the luxuriant honeysuckle where *she* had stood, and recalling every shade and tone of the pretty picture. He even fancied he saw the flutter of the dainty crimson ribbon with which she had tied up the long graceful sprays. A figure rising out of the shadow of the fence startled him from his reverie, and a hand—a hard, rough hand—grasped his with a grip of iron.

"How is she, doctor—how is my pretty Blossom?" And Hugh Morey's hard voice trembled in a husky whisper, and the eyes

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that looked out from under the shaggy brows were heavy with indefinable fear.

"Miss Hargrave is still lying insensible. Whether it is to be life or death, it is impossible now to say."

"But you can save her, *doctor*?" he asked, imploringly. "O, you must save her—my little girl!" he cried, in sudden anguish. "I promised to be a father to her—the poor stricken lamb! and I haven't been. I have let her stay here a-mourning and a-worrying herself into this, and if she should die—O doctor! you don't think she will die?" a rude pathos in his voice.

"Calm yourself, Mr. Morey," he replied, his own lip trembling a little, "we will hope for the best. If she lives we will see that she is never left alone so again. I too have failed in my duty towards the lonely orphan; if she is spared to us we will try to atone, Mr. Morey."

"Ay, that we will, sir," was the fervent answer.

Morning came over the hills with glad, swift feet, and the thrush's and oriole's song in the orchard closes, and the wanton wind blew the sweetness and melody across the beautiful unconscious face of Lena Hargrave, but woke no answering thrill in the dormant pulses. All day long Mollie Sterne went softly to and fro, every thought of her heart a perpetual prayer for her darling's life. Doctor Dinsmore came in and looked at her every little while, and passed out again with a pale, compressed lip. Over at the Bluff Hugh Morey walked restlessly up and down the beach, his eyes fixed steadily on the little gothic window, with the white curtain fluttering in the fitful breeze, where he knew she lay.

People drove softly by the house with sobered faces, and a few of the nearer neighbors came in on tiptoe and looked at the white, upturned face, bearing such a close semblance to death, and went silently out again. And so the day wore away, and evening came again. Doctor Dinsmore was standing beside the bed, his fingers on her wrist, when suddenly the waxen lids lifted, and she looked steadily in his face. His face lighted, and an involuntary "thank God!" burst from his lips.

A slow, sweet smile came into the brown eyes, and hovered about the half-parted lips, and with a long, fluttering sigh, the eyelids drooped again, and she fell into a quiet, natural sleep.

Mollie Sterne covered her face with her apron and wept softly to herself, and Doctor Dinsmore bowed his head in his hands, but neither spoke. After a little Mollie stole softly out to the back door where Luke was sitting, and whispered the good tidings in his ear, which so overjoyed the honest fellow that he took Mollie's face between his hands and kissed it by way of expressing his delight.

He had never dared so much before, and Mollie would probably have boxed his ears soundly if he had, but her heart was very soft just now, and so she only blushed a little, and suffered her wet cheek to lie just a moment against his bosom, which from gratitude —or some other emotion—throbbed so loudly that Mollie was frightened lest it should disturb the fair sleeper, and so slipped softly away, though he made an effort to detain her.

Lena Hargrave came back to life very slowly. For days and days the gates of death stood ajar, and her white garments brushed almost against them. Alas, that there should have come a time afterwards, when she wished with her whole heart that she had passed their open portals in her purity and innocence.

Mollie Sterne installed herself as nurse, and never had invalid tenderer care, or more patient, faithful nursing. Through the long, hot days, Mollie never thought of weariness or discomfort where *her* comfort was concerned. And at last she had her reward by seeing the faint color creep into the transparent cheek, and something of the old brightness to the pretty brown eyes. But there was a little shadow there always—a vague, indistinct shadow—like the reflection of far-away overhanging trees in a woodland pool. It troubled her not a little, and one night it came into her dreams. She thought she saw Lena lying faint and bruised at the bottom of a wild, dark ravine. Sharp, precipitous rocks shut her in on either side, and at her feet, writhing in and out like a beautiful serpent, swept a swift, gleaming river, whose transparent waters took coloring from every rock, and tree, and cloud reflected in it. But as she looked closer she saw cruel rocks, and dark whirlpools under the beautiful surface. The river crept gradually nearer and nearer the helpless girl, and she knew when it once reached her feet, that it would bear her away on its restless tide. She stood spellbound, listening to the soft plash of the bewildering river, and watching it creep nearer and nearer with

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soft, sinuous motion. All at once, just as the waters were lapping the hem of her garment, a hand was suddenly lowered from above, which lifted her safely and steadily out of the gloom, and darkness, and danger, into the bright sunshine. As the shadows of the rock fell away from them, and the light struck across their faces, she saw, as plainly as she ever did in her waking moments, the calm, strong face of Basil Dinsmore, but there was a new glory—an indescribable radiance illuming it, which she never had seen in her waking moments. Long afterwards, when she had nearly forgotten it, it all came back to her, as she waited with more than the olden terror and suspense for its final fulfilment.

It was very evident that Lena was no longer a subject for medicine, though Doctor Dinsmore still continued his visits. He timed them a little differently, however, for, instead of making a brief morning call in conjunction with his other visits, he delayed them often till evening, or such other time as he was most at leisure. And whatever effect his visits had upon his patient, it was very evident that upon the physician himself their effect was truly wonderful. There was a new elasticity in his step, and a deeper light in his eyes. He smiled oftener, and altogether a different sort of a smile. It struck Mollie one day that Doctor Dinsmore was growing handsome, and she mentioned it to Lena. To her astonishment Lena blushed and was silent. She pondered it over in her heart all day, and when Luke happened in (which happened pretty often—too often I am afraid for the interest of "science"), she announced that she had made a discovery, and asked him to guess its nature.

"That I am in love with you," he said, laughing, to hide his embarrassment at his own boldness.

"Nonsense! do be serious, Luke Varney," her ruddy face taking on a deeper shade.

"Serious, Mollie! I wish I could make you realize how very serious I am. If I try to tell you, you turn me off with light words, and laugh at me. O Mollie! if you only knew—"

"'Where ignorance is bliss,'" she laughed, "you know the rest, Luke. But what I started to tell you was of more importance than—than—"

"Than my love, Mollie, do you mean that?" a slight quiver in his voice.

"Don't interrupt me so, Luke. I shall never be able to tell you in the world at this rate," looking at him with a little wicked, sideways glance. "But you must promise me upon your honor that you wont breathe a word of it to any living soul. I wouldn't tell anybody but *you*, Luke, not for anything."

The "you" brought Luke round instanter, and he was willing to promise anything and everything—in fact, a good deal more than she was quite ready to have him!

"Well," she said, after he had taken the requisite number of oaths, "I think Doctor Dinsmore and Miss Lena are in love with each other. What do you think of that?"

"I think it's more likely than that *two other* people that I know of ever will be—leastways, *one* of 'em."

"I wish I hadn't told you!" Mollie exclaimed.

"No, don't say that, dear—I mean Mollie. I do think it is real queer, though, and him so much older. But I'm very glad if it is so, for I reckon Mr. Walter didn't leave much, and Miss Lena aint much used to work, and she's too proud to be dependent."

While Luke and Mollie stood in the porch discussing the subject, Doctor Dinsmore himself came in at the gate and passed into the little sitting-room. The thought of what Mollie had said came into Lena's mind when she glanced up at him, and sent a soft shower of blushes to her neck and brow. Perhaps it was this that enabled him to come and stand over her chair and lift the little blue-veined hand to his lips.

"Lena," he said, "do you remember the first time I ever came here, and that you touched your lips to my hand?"

"Yes," she said, dropping her eyes.

"Well, little one, I have loved you ever since." He paused as if he had said more than he intended to. The lids drooped over the downcast eyes, and the little hand in his fluttered like a timid bird. "Speak, Lena; you are not angry?" he pleaded. "I don't wish to make you unhappy with my love. It is no idle words that I speak when I say that I had rather die than bring a shadow of regret or pain into your heart. I know that I am twice your years, but, O darling! my heart is young and fresh. I never loved any woman but my mother before I saw you, dear. But if it is only trouble or sorrow to you, forget that I ever told you of it."

"I do not wish to forget it," she said, in a low, clear tone, a soft, peach-bloom pink suffusing her pure cheek.

He stooped suddenly and looked in her

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face, and with a little glad cry, took her to his heart, saying over and over again, "my love!" "my darling!"—the same old words that have been said so many millions of times, but whose sweetness never wears out.

"You are quite sure you love me, dear?" he said, when he had released her, and sat looking at her and marvelling at his own happiness. "You are quite sure you will never regret it? Because if you are not, though *I* could never love *you* less, I would not be any clog or hinderance to your happiness, which is more to me, darling—a thousand times more —than my own can ever be."

Did any dark shadow of the future flit like a spectre across his path? If it did, it vanished when Lena's clear voice said:

"Yes, Basil, I am quite sure that I love you."

She had never called him Basil before—no one had since his mother died—and the word unlocked the secret, inner sanctuary of his soul, and she passed within, never—never to be cast out, whatever came to pass.

Doctor Dinsmore's visit was protracted beyond its usual length this evening, to Luke Varney's secret delight, for it gave Mollie no excuse for leaving him, and though he did not succeed in getting any very satisfactory responses to *his* wooing, it was nevertheless very much better than sitting alone in his little domicil contemplating the rocks and brambles that composed the staple of his farm, and cogitating upon the possibility of "blasting" the entire concern.

Mollie had a keen suspicion of what had transpired, but it was two days after that Lena called her to her, and laying her little thin hand on her arm, with a shy blush, said:

"How do you like it, Mollie?"

Mollie looked down and saw a plain gold ring, surmounted by a delicate frostwork of leaves encircling a minute cluster of sapphire stars.

"It is beautiful!" she exclaimed, enthusiastically.

"It was *his* mother's," she said, with a tender smile.

Mollie put both arms round her neck and kissed her.

"I am so glad, my darling!" she said.

"I am very glad too, Mollie," she said, naively. "I know that I am only a weak, foolish little girl—not half good enough or wise enough for him, but I do love him, Mollie, very dearly, and you have no idea how he rests me. I am never tired, or nervous, or troubled about anything when I am with him —*he* is so strong!"

Mollie looked long and searchingly in the soft brown eyes uplifted to her face, but though they were suffused with tears, there was no trace of the olden shadow in their sunny depths.

Rose Cottage was shut up and Lena went up to Mrs. Hargrave's while the necessary preparations were pending. Doctor Dinsmore would not consent to her being left alone again, and Mollie was pretty well tired out with her double duties at the cottage and the Bluff. She would gladly have had Lena go home with her, but Mrs. Hargrave begged so hard that Doctor Dinsmore thought perhaps she had better go there, besides, she was her uncle's wife, and had some claim on her from that.

Mrs. Hargrave was changed a good deal of late. She had grown nervous and timid, and her old air of haughtiness had quite forsaken her. She had grown thin, and there were dark circles under her eyes, which were preternaturally large, with a look of regret or pain in them. People said she was a great mourner for her husband, and that her grief was wearing her out. *She* said that it was staying alone so much in that great lonely house—so like a great stone tomb, and begged, as an act of humanity, that Lena would stay with her until Doctor Dinsmore's house was duly swept and garnished, and her own wardrobe made ready. Mrs. Hargrave also insisted on buying Lena's bridal outfit, and grew more cheerful than she had been for a long while in its preparation. And Lena almost forgot there had ever been coldness or estrangement between them, only wondering a little sometimes why she never spoke of her father to her, and grew silent and strange when she talked of him. Another name was not often mentioned between them—Leslie Wolcott. It seemed to Lena as if in some incomprehensible way, he was connected with her illness —a part of her disease, she thought. She had a faint, indistinct consciousness of the peculiar influence he had over her, but attributed it mostly to the unnatural, morbid state of her mind and body. The experience of that last four weeks preceding her illness seemed almost entirely blotted from her memory. She tried sometimes to recall it, but it eluded her like an indistinct dream. But she was too quietly happy to waste much time in idle speculations. If only *he* could have lived to

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witness her happiness. She liked to recall every little word of praise she had ever heard her father utter concerning *him*, and wished he could only know! wondering if perchance he did. Long afterwards she looked back upon these days, and remembered their sweetness and their content. They came back to her like rare, golden dreams, only that they were never vague or indistinct, but always bold, and clear, and sweet. And all the sorrow, and regret, and pain that came into her after-life, never marred or clouded their brightness.

The old feud still existed between Mrs. Hargrave and Hugh Morey. She was well aware that he knew, or guessed at a secret chapter in her life which no one else did, and she never forgave him the knowledge. It was so long ago that she might have thought he had forgotten, only from some words he had let slip at the time of her husband's death. Not that *she* had ever forgotten—ever for a single hour, through all the long years, or ever, ever would.

And so, though Hugh and Mollie were both longing to see their favorite, they would not—or least Hugh would not—go to Mrs. Hargrave's for that purpose. But one day—a week or two before her marriage—Lena had run out into the street to tell Luke that if he would come after her that night in the boat that she would go over to the Bluff for a few days. Luke promised with a pleased face, and hastened over to the Bluff to communicate the good tidings. Mollie was half wild with delight, making Luke tell her over and over just what she said, and how she looked.

"She looked happy, Luke?" she questioned. "you are sure my pretty darling looked happy?"

And then he would tell all over again how she came running down the street, her brown curls blowing over her face, and just the sweetest pink coming and going in her pure cheek, and her eyes!—here Luke would pause, unable to find any simile half bright or beautiful enough to describe them.

And Hugh left the nets he was mending, and came and stood in the door and listened each time that he repeated it, saying softly to himself, as he went back to his nets:

"She hasn't forgotten us—my Pretty! She isn't too proud to come and see old Hugh, if Celia Hargrave has coaxed her up with fine things."

Mollie was so impatient to see her pet, that Luke started earlier than he had arranged with Lena. It was hardly dusk when he fastened his boat, and began his waiting for her. A heavy scud blew up from the south, and it was lonesome waiting on the shore, and so he walked slowly down the street, expecting every moment to meet her. There was a straggling belt of pines where two roads met, and a broken, frost-flung wall running almost into the road. He could see the Hargrave mansion from here, and so he sat down on a stone to wait. He had only a moment to wait ere he saw her coming (as he thought) down the street. There was a man with her—Doctor Dinsmore—he decided at once, coming down to the shore with her. He wished he had stopped by the boat, they wouldn't perhaps care for his company, he thought, and was seriously meditating some sort of a cut across to avoid intruding on them, when the man's voice struck his ear—it was *not* Doctor Dinsmore's. Whose was it? As they came nearer, and he heard it again—they were talking earnestly—it struck him as strangely familiar, and yet he could not quite recall it.

All this time he had not a thought of the woman's being other than Lena. She was talking in a low, regretful tone, when the man exclaimed in an impatient voice:

"Remember, it was at *your* bidding I did it."

"It is false, Barry Gray!" she exclaimed, fiercely. "You know I would sooner have given my life than—"

At that instant Luke supposed they must have seen him—for they were nearly opposite—for the woman gave a little low cry, and the two hurried past and disappeared in the darkness. Almost immediately he saw Lena coming, and went on to meet her, wondering how he could have mistaken the weary, lagging step of that woman, for Lena's light, tripping feet; and wondering, too, if *she* knew who had passed just before her, and wondering more still why *he* was here, and what *she* should be out walking with him for, and what he had done "at her bidding."

But Lena was so happy, and talked so fast, and was so evidently delighted at the prospect of her visit, that the dark shadow that had crossed his path faded out of his mind. Lena took one of the oars, and though Luke begged her not to, rowed all the way, laughing gayly at her blundering, uncertain strokes, and telling Mollie, as she held her in her arms on the shore, what a nice, nice time she had had, and asked her if she wasn't the least bit in the world jealous. And then she laughed, and kissed old Hugh's shaggy beard, and ran on before them to the house like a frolicsome

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child. How pretty and gay she was, and how they watched her with hungry, loving eyes, and thought that nowhere, in all the world, could there ever be another such an one as their "darling!"

Luke Varney had just sat down to his solitary breakfast—made doubly solitary by the thought of the delicate, snowy table-cloth (Luke didn't affect table-cloths), and the light, delicious rolls, and delicate, flaky tarts, and more still, the bright, smiling faces that were doubtless at that moment gathered about *another* breakfast-table not far away—feeling utterly desperate and miserable. "What was the use for him to stay there?—he might as well go away and done with it. Probably nobody in Brent (meaning nobody *but* Mollie Sterne) would care if he did." And he swallowed his coffee at a gulp—burning his throat by the operation—and felt just as perfectly miserable as any one could ever desire to. A sudden shadow fell across the table, and he looked up just in season to catch the glimpse of a woman's shawl, and then there came a low, distinct rap on the door.

Luke was not accustomed to receiving morning calls from the ladies, and a momentary feeling of shame and embarrassment came over him as he cast his eye over his domicil, conscious for the first time of its general disorder; for, like most male housekeepers, "Heaven's first law" was not particularly his forte. Hastily catching an old coat, two pairs of dilapidated trowsers, a straw hat, a dirty shirt, and two towels, and a pair of well-ventilated stockings from the nearest and *emptiest* chair, and tossing them in a heap in the corner, he went to the door, and met, to his astonishment, Mrs. Hargrave.

"Are you alone, Luke?" she asked, hurriedly.

"Yes ma'am," said Luke, meekly.

"Then I will come in a moment."

He stepped back and she passed in before him. She took a seat without seeming to see the room, or anything it contained. She did not raise her veil, but Luke saw through it enough to see that she was deadly pale, and her eyes were unnaturally black.

"You saw me last night?" she asked, abruptly.

Luke bowed, and she went on:

"You saw also the—the man who was with me?"

Luke bowed again.

"You—did you know him?"

"I heard you call his name, ma'am."

"What else did you hear?" she asked, sharply, and then interrupting him as he was about to speak. "No matter! I know very well—or at least very near. Have you a good memory, Luke?"

"Tolerable, I think."

She took out a purse and threw it on the table.

"There," she said, "will that be any help to you in carrying on operations on your little farm? I believe there are two hundred dollars in it; I think you will find use for it. I learn you anticipate making some improvements."

"But Mrs. Hargrave, how am I to—"

"Pay me?" she interrupted. "I make you a free present of it, Luke, that is if you can manage to forget any little thing you happened to see or hear last night."

Luke took up the purse, his face flushing.

"I cannot take your money as a bribe, Mrs. Hargrave."

"Nonsense! it is not a bribe, you foolish fellow. You were a great favorite of Mr. Hargrave's, and I think he would have liked for you to have it."

"But you brought it to me to purchase my silence," persisted Luke.

"I brought it to you because I wanted to, Luke. But, Luke, I ask you, as a great personal favor, that you will say nothing of *his* being here. He has already left town, and you are the only person that saw him. I do not ask it as any favor to him—I remember you were not the best of friends—but because my being seen walking with him might give occasion for gossiping remarks, which would be very painful to me to bear."

She leaned her head on her hand with a little weary sigh, and Luke, looking at the sharpened face, and sorrowful, dejected air, so unlike the old haughtiness of manner, that all his olden dislike and suspicion was dissolved in pity for this pale, sad-eyed woman; and so he said, speaking very gently:

"I cannot take your money, Mrs. Hargrave, but as to that *other* matter, I give you my word of honor, that, from anything I may say, you are in no danger of being compromised."

"I wish you would take the money, Luke. Why will you not let me help you?"

"O, I'm getting along nicely," smiling a little.

"I will not forget it, Luke," she said, putting out her hand, which was cold as ice, and trembled as she laid it in his, saying, "I know

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I can trust you. You never did deceive me."

After she had gone, he remembered that those were the very words which Dane Hargrave had uttered, that night when he sent him for his brother, and perhaps a little feeling of honest pride stirred in his heart, that he *was* worthy to be trusted, for that he was he knew in his own heart; which, whatever the world's judgment, is more than every man knows of himself.

It was quite late in September before the doctor and Lena were married. There was so much to be done to the old house (it had been Doctor Dinsmore's maternal grandfather's) to make it fit for her—indeed, his love would gladly have installed her in a palace—so much tearing down, and rebuilding, and modernizing, that he began to grow almost impatient, and believe that there never was before such very, very slow workmen as those which droned over the old house. But it was all completed at last, and one bright, autumnal Sabbath Basil Dinsmore and Lena Hargrave were married in the little Presbyterian church in Brent, and went very quietly to the old house to live. It was a great, roomy house, with the cosiest of nooks, and the sunniest of sunny windows, and great, patriarchal elms stretched their protecting arms over it, and the birds set up housekeeping in their branches, and sang love songs to each other all the long summer through. But the nests were lonely and deserted now; but when another spring came, Lena thought—and went singing gayly through the old house, a sweeter music, Basil Dinsmore thought, than all the songs of all the birds that ever sang.

I wish that my story were done now. I wish that I could leave them here—where stories usually leave their heroes and heroines—standing on the rosy threshold of life, and let the reader fancy them "living happy forever after." It might be pleasanter for both writer and reader to believe marriage to be the golden gate leading into the enchanted regions from which all sorrow, and pain, and sin are forever debarred; that, having once got our favorite heroes or heroines through those charmed portals, all grief, and wrong, and trouble fall away from them, and they have only to feast on perpetual sweets, *ad libitum, ad infinitum.*

But, unfortunately, pleasant as it might be, it is very far from being the real truth. All of us who know much of life, know that all the keenest pangs, the direst despair, the bitterest sorrow, and the deepest tragedies of life come not to the youths and maidens of the land, but are born out of a love stronger, and deeper, and more vital than any pre-nuptial passion is capable of conceiving.

The short autumn days ran away on sweet, swift feet, and only that Lena still mourned for her father, she would have been supremely happy, though sometimes a little shadow of loneliness crept into her life. Her husband's practice was very large, embracing all the country neighborhoods surrounding Brent. Sometimes she scarcely saw him for two or three days, and though he was always gentle and tender towards her, she could not help seeing how preoccupied he was, and how the cares and duties of his profession intruded upon his domestic life. He had told her he loved her, and had given her the strongest proof of it that a man can give a woman, by marrying her. It never therefore entered his heart that she would care to hear it every day or two. He supposed the thing was fully and fairly understood, and a continual assertion of the fact seemed entirely uncalled for. Besides, his feelings were very deep, and he *could not* talk of them easily. He had taken his pretty young wife into the inner, secret sanctuary of his heart—taken her there for all time; but he shrank from talking of it, as in some way a sort of sacrilege.

There was no doubt but Doctor Dinsmore understood the human *body* to perfection—every nerve, and vein, and sinew; but of the wants and workings of a woman's heart, he was profoundly ignorant. Alas, that he has so many peers!

And yet Lena was very happy, though conscious sometimes of a faint feeling of *ennui* as she sat out the long winter evenings alone. She did not intend it, but unconsciously she came to comparing them with the pleasant evenings that she used to spend with her father, recalling dreamily little passages in the books they had read together (her husband only read medical works), and fancying she could see again the tender smile and tenderer words that filled the pleasant pauses. Her father had never been chary of loving words, and she had been bred to them, and pined for them, knowing all the while that it was weak and foolish; but she was only a woman—a young, enthusiastic, loving woman, full of warm impulses and quick sympathies, and overrunning with poetic fervor and vague, unutterable longings.

Sometime during the early days of March,

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Leslie Wolcott came back to Brent. He met Luke Varney as he came up the street. They were nearly opposite Rose Cottage, which had been closed since the previous autumn. He glanced up at the closed blinds, and a chill, which was not of the sea damp or the March air, struck to his heart.

"Looks lonesome, don't it?" Luke said.

"Yes; is it closed?"

"For the present," he replied, his heart beating a little quicker as he remembered Mollie's half promise to come over and be its mistress if he could prevail on Lena to sell it.

"Is Miss Hargrave away?" he asked, controlling himself with an effort.

"*Miss* Hargrave! Dear me! don't you know that there isn't any Miss Hargrave now? Didn't you know our little Lena was married?" his voice a trifle exultant.

The sky seemed to open suddenly, and a bolt of liquid fire cleft the air and buried itself in his brain. The long, sandy road went round and round, and vanished in the sea, and the little town faded and melted into the earth. But it was only for an instant, and even in that instant his lips had framed a mechanical "No." Fortunately Luke was not a keen observer, and not given to suspicion, and so, though he noticed Wolcott was looking rather pale, he went on and told the story of Lena's illness, and her subsequent marriage to the doctor.

He was just in time, for a moment after Doctor Dinsmore himself came up. After greetings had been exchanged, he said, cordially:

"Come up and see us, Wolcott. Lena will be delighted to renew the acquaintance. I believe you and she used to be fast friends. Don't mind my being in. I hardly get time to eat and sleep, and cannot entertain my friends as I wish I might."

Wolcott gave some sort of a vague promise, he hardly knew what, and they parted.

O that for one little moment the veil might have lifted from the faithful future!

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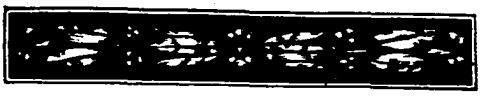

A WOMAN'S ERROR.

BY MRS. R. B. EDSON.

CHAPTER VII.

It had been the longest, dreariest winter that Celia Hargrave had ever known. Not that she looked forward with any very pleasant anticipation of spring—she was not sensible of looking forward to anything with any particular feeling of pleasure—but because the great stone walls seemed to shut her in so, and she had a nervous desire to get away from between them, lest sometime she found herself crushed between them. She used to have a fancy sometimes that they were gradually contracting, and half wild with morbid terror and apprehension, she would put a shawl over her and run out into the yard before she could overcome the impression.

It was therefore with unalloyed pleasure that she welcomed Leslie, and inwardly resolved that he should not leave her again. He had been there nearly a week before she said anything to him about Agnes Carroll. She was waiting to see if he would not mention it. She had resolved to urge the marriage immediately, and have them come to Brent, if she would consent. Perhaps the old house would not seem quite so terrible then. She waited as long as she was able, and then she broached the subject.

"Do you guess what a nice little plan I have for you, Leslie?" she said, coming up beside him as he stood looking off, with dreamy, introspective eyes. She spoke twice before he answered, and then he started like one waking out of a sleep.

"What?" he said.

She repeated it, adding:

"I have quite set my heart on it."

"No, I do not guess, what is it?"

"I want you to be married and bring Agnes here to stay with me. You have no idea how much I have suffered here this winter," she said, shuddering.

"Agnes Carroll will never come to Brent, Celia."

"But Agnes *Wolcott* will, Leslie."

"There never will be an Agnes Wolcott."

"What do you mean, Leslie? You have not broken with Agnes?" grasping his arm, and looking searchingly in his face.

"We have both come to the conclusion that we are unsuited to each other. *She* thinks me too dreamy and mythical; *I* think her too independent and strong-minded."

"Leslie, did you *ever* love her? I have thought sometimes that you did not. How did it happen that you became engaged?"

"Well, I hardly know, myself. I think, though, that I liked her once, before—" he checked himself abruptly, and looked out of the window.

"Before when?" she persisted.

"Before I found out my mistake. We will not talk about it any more, Celia, please. I shall probably never marry, so you can rely upon my company, alone, at the old house."

"Will you stay, Leslie?" she asked, eagerly.

"I don't know. I suppose I ought to do something—everybody is expected to in this prosaic age," with a little grimace of disgust.

"What a dreamy, indolent fellow you are, Leslie!" she laughed. "You are sadly out of place in this practical, go-ahead, money-making land. But you need not trouble yourself about 'doing' anything, if you will only stay in Brent. There are only you and I, Leslie, and I have enough for both; say you will stay with me, or I shall be tempted to leave Brent altogether, for I cannot, nor will not stay here and undergo what I have this winter, again," she said, with despairing vehemence.

He looked down into her face, noting for the first time how much older and sadder it looked, and with a little feeling of pity for her loneliness, as well as a natural repugnance to exertion on his own part, he said briefly:

"I will stay in Brent, Celia."

She did not speak, only leaned over and kissed him. After a little pause she said:

"Leslie, I saw Lena Dinsmore yesterday. I think she thinks it strange you do not call there. And I do too, for, aside from the fact

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of our families being connected, I thought you used to like Lena very much. I am sure you went there often enough last summer. Do you know," she said, laughing a little, "that at one time I was silly enough to think that perhaps you cared for each other?"

"Well?" he said, clenching his slender white fingers until the blood showed purple under the transparent nails.

"O, well, I discovered my mistake. I was just silly enough after you went away, to go up and see Lena, taking occasion to mention —quite incidentally of course—that something besides business had called you away; in short, that you were and had been engaged to a certain young lady, for several years."

"Why did you do that?" turning upon her almost fiercely.

"Don't be angry, Leslie. I did not suppose *you* would care, and from the indifference with which she received the information, I was satisfied that my suspicions were unfounded."

He turned back to the window, his hands relaxing their tension, and falling nerveless by his side.

"I wish you would go with me this afternoon, Leslie," she said, renewing the conversation. "I think she would be pleased, for, just between you and I—though she and the doctor are very much in love with each other —I think she is just a little ennuied sometimes. You know how grave and quiet he is; and though at heart the tenderest and gentlest of men, I think his calmness, and dignity, and evident strength, make her a little in awe of him. I think she would rather he would be a little more demonstrative, and a little more human, and not quite so rigidly good."

"You do not think she is unhappy?" he asked, his face still towards the window.

"O no! only a little restless, and perhaps a little disappointed, as most young, imaginative girls are, when the beautiful aureole that illuminated their fancy fades into the calm, quiet light of everyday life. And especially is this the case when the lightness and impulsiveness of youth is mated with the quietness and sobriety of mature years. Doctor Dinsmore is twenty years older than his wife, and it is impossible for him to look at life precisely as she does; besides, he is one of those deep, strong, self-contained natures, that seldom show their feelings on the surface; while she is impulsive, eager, sensitive, easily impressed by her surroundings, of an imaginative, rather demonstrative, temperament. There, you have the whole story as I understand it. Do not imagine, though, from what I have said, that it is an ill-assorted match. On the contrary, I think that there are the elements of a perfect union—always excepting the disparity in age—when time, and a more thorough knowledge of each other, shall have assimilated their tastes, habits and thoughts. Now will you go?"

"Yes, I will go once—just once, since you think I had better."

"Don't you care to go, Leslie—don't you care to see her?"

"Care to see her!" he exclaimed, his face kindling and flashing; "that is just the reason I have not been."

"What a riddle you are, Leslie!"

"Am I? Well, don't try to unravel me. As I have told you before, I am a problem to myself, and I have got tired of trying to solve the complicated enigma. In future I am going to stop struggling—for, as indolent a fellow as you think me, I have struggled desperately with fate and nature, which are both strangely against me—and see where I shall drift."

"Well, to come back to the question, will you accompany me to Mrs. Dinsmore's this afternoon? I promised the doctor I would come up. He goes up to Marbleheath to attend a consultation upon a peculiar case that defies the medical talent of the town, and will not be back until to-morrow. He said he fancied Lena was getting lonesome in the old house, he was away so much, and they had so little company."

"Yes, I will go. At what hour will you be ready?"

"Well, we will say three o'clock—but you will be in to dinner?"

"I cannot tell—perhaps," seizing his hat and walking swiftly out.

Mrs. Hargrave stood at the window and saw him disappear down the street at the same quick, nervous gait. But she never dreamed, indolent as she thought him, that he walked five miles out into the country, and back, before he came into his dinner, nearly an hour late.

Lena was expecting Mrs. Hargrave, and thought it just possible her brother might accompany her. She was sensible of feeling a trifle nervous at the thought of meeting him, and called herself silly for the feeling. After she had seen him once, she thought, she would not care; for though she could not

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quite forget the strange, mesmeric influence that he had exerted over her—and which she believed held him, somehow, too—she had not the most remote feeling of tenderness for him more than other men. This she said over and over to herself that afternoon, as she walked restlessly from room to room, trying in vain to set herself to some task. The house was preternaturally still, and the clock ticked with an awful distinctness, else she would have believed it stopped, the hours dragged so. Jane Davitt, her little maid-of-all-work, had gone up to see her mother, who was ill with a fever, and she was utterly alone. She sat wondering if it would always be so; if all her life—and life looked very long to her, as it always does to the young—she should find the hours so dull and leaden; if *he* never would stay with her any more; if the great house would always seem so staid and still; if by-and-by she, herself, should not grow grave and silent as everything else about her, —never laughing, never singing, but gliding silently through the long, sober years.

A low, soft tinkle of the bell made her spring hastily to her feet in the midst of her reverie. She knew intuitively *who* it was before she saw the dark, handsome face, or looked into the deep, dreamy eyes, or felt the soft pressure of his palm, sending a sudden, indescribable thrill along every nerve and artery. She felt vexed and annoyed that this man had power to move her so, and with a strong effort of will she threw off the influence so far that her calmness and self-possession, in a measure, returned, and she was able to perform the duties of hostess very creditably. Her old flow of spirits returned, and all the loneliness and gloom that had overshadowed her spirits vanished away, and a certain buoyancy of feeling, a brightness and lightness, as if she had suddenly risen into some clearer and more rarefied air, lifted her out of herself, and made her gay and brilliant, quite beyond anything Mrs. Hargrave ever remembered of her. She was very charming in this new mood, however, and Mrs. Hargrave was not the only one under the spell; indeed, they all felt something of this strange, electric force, that sometimes, in certain conditions of mind and body, lifts us out of the dull grooves of common feeling, into some radiant mount of transfiguration. There may be souls to whom these rarer moments never come—whose feet are never lifted from the earth, into the dull round of whose monotonous days no white stone is ever set to mark these glorified moments. But I think there are very few to whom, at some time, it has not been given to feel this fine, mysterious power.

The bright April afternoon merged into the cool, sweet evening, bringing sweet scents of moss and fern from the damp woods, and the cheerful sounds of awakening life from every marshy pool. Nature's life and Nature's heart were full of sweet prophecies, and amid its soft enchantment Leslie Wolcott walked home, hardly seeing or touching the earth. His sister talked to him, he knew, but of what, he knew not. A soft, intangible mist surrounded him, shutting out all the world but her! Why *had* he gone? and yet how transcendently happy it had made him!

He lay awake a long while after his mind had recovered something of its natural tone, and the enchantment, though not dispelled, had lost a little of its glamour, trying to decide on his future course. Should he rush recklessly into this alluring flame? Where and how would it all end, if he did? He shuddered, and shut his eyes, but waking or sleeping, a sweet, bewildering vision beckoned him perpetually with white, soft fingers, and O, he was so weak!

Mollie Sterne was not overpleased when Luke informed her of the return of Wolcott. Somehow, the beautiful winding river, writhing in and through the gloomy gorge, that had terrified her in her dream, always in some inexplicable way assimilated itself in her thoughts with him. But she chided herself for her folly, for was not Lena safe in the love of a brave, strong, true man? And had not her dream already had its perfect fulfilment in Lena's marriage with the doctor? And then she chided herself again for being suspicious and uncharitable towards Wolcott; for might not the terrible, swift-flowing river be the tide of death, from which Doctor Dinsmore had reached down and saved her? And in the midst of her uncertainty she had another dream more impressive and vivid than the first.

She thought she was in the midst of a beautiful forest. Great, solemn, magnificent trees lifted their heads to the sky, with drifts of pale sunlight filtering through their branches. The rarest and most brilliant birds sang in the trees, and flitted, like shivered rainbows, through the soft gloom. A sweet, intoxicating perfume exhaled from the long, drooping clusters of beautiful flowers that clung to the massive trunks, or swayed from the overhanging branches. The thick-green

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moss was as soft as the rarest velvet, and sitting on it, her hair and bosom bound with flowers, she saw Lena Dinsmore. The birds sang in her ears, and the sunshine drifted across her feet. There was a dreamy look in her eyes, and her white hands were folded listlessly in her lap. But the fear and horror of the dream was, that in that beautiful enchanted forest lurked a terrible miasma—a death in life—a soft, seductive poison, that, while it charmed the senses with sweets, stole irresistibly to the vitals and inflicted the death-wound. Just beyond the forest lay a still, shadowless lake, and as she gazed the forest moved almost imperceptibly to the lake, and as it touched the shore it melted and vanished in its fathomless depths. And still the forest moved on, and still she sat with folded hands, the odorous flowers on brow and bosom, and the dreamy look still in her eyes. One after another the lofty trees went down, with never a stir or ripple in the silent wave, and nearer and nearer she came to the strange shore. She tried to shout to her to warn her of her danger, but her lips were dumb and she could make no sound. In an agony of terror, and with the perspiration starting from every pore, she made one fierce spring towards her just as her feet touched the syren sea, and she vanished, like bird, and tree, and blossom, under its still, shadowless surface!

She awoke with a wild, frightened cry, to find herself sitting up in bed, her arms extended, and trembling in every limb. She was used to dreams—in fact she rather liked them—but this! What could it mean? Would it come true? What fathomless gulf yawned for her darling, from which no hand would save?

"I wish you'd dream of me sometimes," Luke said, when she told it to him.

"H'm! I never dream of people I don't think about," was the consoling answer.

"*I* think it all comes of sleeping alone. Now *I* have the most wretched—"

A ringing blow on the ears saved him the necessity of repeating *his* dreams; and Mollie mentally declared that she "never would tell the bold impertinent fellow another dream so long as she lived—never!" blushing scarlet at the thought of his impudence. "She guessed he'd have to live in his shanty, and cook his own meat and potatoes a good long day yet, for all her!" And yet that very evening she dressed herself in a pretty blue merino that Luke especially admired, and when after all her trouble the "impertinent fellow" didn't come, she went to bed feeling as out of sorts as it was possible for such an amiable little body to be. And, strangely enough—though she wouldn't *he* should have known it for fifty pounds—she *did* dream of Luke, and what was still more provoking, that she was married to him!

"As if I ever would do such an absurd thing!" breaking her night-cap string in her vexation, and letting all her pretty brown hair over her shoulders.

It was perhaps two or three days afterward that the tenants at the Bluff were surprised by a call from Leslie Wolcott.

"He had taken," he said, "a whim to go out over the bar. He had long had a curiosity to go, but not having a particular fancy for being drowned, he had never ventured."

"Well?" said Hugh, with a quick glance from under his shaggy brows.

"I want you to pilot me over, and show me some of the crooks and turns in this dangerous little bay. Could you go, sir? I will pay you well for your trouble."

"I aint suffering for money, as I know of," was the ungracious answer.

"I had not supposed you were. But if I took up your time it would be right for me to pay you, wouldn't it?"

Hugh did not reply, but stood looking off over the harbor bar with that strange, inscrutable look on his face that it always wore when he was asked to go *there*. Twenty-three years had come and gone, and yet forever, to his eyes, a gallant ship came plunging and drifting on to that cruel bar, her broken masts and tattered sails fluttering and crashing among the rocks.

"It would be a very great favor, Mr. Morey," Leslie said, after he had watched him a while in silence.

"The tide will be right in half an hour. Be at the further point in that time;" pointing at a sharp ledge of grayish white rocks that swept in a shelving circle at the further extremity of the landward side of the Bluff, and turning and walking abruptly towards the house, leaving Leslie to wonder over his eccentricity.

In precisely half an hour they met at the specified place, and without a word on either side, stepped into the boat and pushed off. For several minutes they went on in silence, each one busy with his thoughts. Presently Wolcott said, as if following out some previous line of thought:

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"Do you think it would be any wise possible for a boat to go out over this bar, with a fierce wind and a high sea, and not be dashed to pieces?"

"*One* did go out so," was the meaning answer.

"I know. I see you divine my thoughts."

"It didn't need any great *penetration* to do that,' was the rather rude answer. "Everybody in Brent knew that Joe Davitt's boat went over the bar *that* night—*how*, God only knows! I am sure *I* cannot conceive."

"And you know the perils better than any other man, doubtless," Wolcott returned, thoughtfully. "But allowing that the boat went over uninjured, would it have been possible for a man to have gone over in it *alive, do you think?*"

Hugh Morey stopped rowing, resting the oars against his knee, and looked up questioningly.

"Do you think it possible, I say?" leaning forward and looking eagerly in his face.

"What," said the old man, slowly, "that Walter Hargrave passed over here in safety?"

"Yes, do you?" eagerly. "I do not ask out of any idle curiosity, Heaven knows!"

"What makes *you* think he did?" Hugh answered, evasively.

"I cannot tell. But I *do* think so. Things *come to me sometimes* strangely. And this brings me to something else that I think you can tell me. Was my sister ever engaged to this Walter Hargrave—or rather, were there ever any love passages between them? But pshaw! why do I ask you? I *know* there was something of the kind—what was *it?*" he spoke almost peremptorily.

"*She* loved him," Hugh answered, slowly.

"Yes, I knew she did!" a faint flush of excitement coming into his face. "But what—how was it?"

"Did *she* tell you?" looking at him sharply from under his overhanging brows.

"She! No; she would sooner cut off her right hand than have me suspect! She does not even dream *that* I do. But I know it—but not all. How did it come about?"

"Well, I never told any one what I knew about it, and I would not tell you, only as you are her brother, and seem to know something of it," he said, reluctantly.

"Go on!" he said, impatiently. And as if impelled by some irresistible power, Hugh continued:

"I was quite a young man when I first knew Celia Gorman. She was a handsome, haughty girl, and proud as Lucifer. But perhaps *you* know that she was poor as well. Well, the Hargraves were of an old family, and the old squire was rich, and as he had only two children of course these boys were reckoned good matches. Mr. Walter was the eldest, and at that time about twenty-three, I think. He was a handsome lad, too, and as brave as he was handsome. I don't know but he might have paid some little attentions to Celia Gorman—I *think* he *did*, but I don't think he ever meant anything serious by it, or that he ever would have married her, if Alicia Kent's pretty face had not crept *into* his heart."

He paused shortly. Another memory was evidently busy in his heart—a memory of another fair face which the remorseless waves did *not* spare.

"And what then?" Wolcott said, after a long silence. He looked up with a start.

"Well, not much that people knew. But the night that Walter Hargrave and Alicia Kent were married, I chanced to be over in the village. It was quite late, I think nearly midnight, when I started for home. My way led by what you know as Rose Cottage; then it was only a bare-looking cheap frame-house with little attractive about it save the young hopeful love that had made its home there; for the old squire had flared up because Walter would persist in marrying a poor, unknown girl, though the Kents were a high family at home, but you couldn't make him believe it. Well, this was the best place Mr. Walter could get to take his sweet young bride to, and I *remember thinking as I* came down the street, that it would be a paradise to him with her in it.

"I had got nearly opposite the house, when—it was a cloudy, still night—a woman crept cautiously round the corner of the house, stooping, as she passed the windows, and entered a little shed—there was no stable then—where she remained very quiet some minutes. I concealed myself by lying down flat on the ground under the shadow of the garden fence. And yet up to that moment I had not the least idea what she was there for. But I knew soon enough, for pretty quick a tiny blue flame shot up from the dark corner where she stood, and hastily gathering her shawl about her she ran swiftly down past the spot where I lay concealed, her dress brushing against my hand as she passed me. It was, as I said, dark and cloudy, and I might not have known her if she had not spoken in

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a low tone of intense bitterness. She was so near me that the words seemed fairly hissed in my ear, as she turned to look back at her work, with a low, mocking laugh on her lips. I knew the voice instantly, but I did not stir or speak until she had gained the further side of the street, and then I sprang up and went as quickly and noiselessly as possible to the rapidly spreading flames, and poured a barrel of water, that sat under the drippings of the eaves, over the combustible mass, quenching it utterly. I do not know, but I expect she saw me when the flames lit up my face, for she knows I saw her, and she has hated me ever since; although Heaven is my witness that I never told human being of it before. Only once, when she spoke insolently to me, I think I did let slip something that reminded her that I knew."

Leslie Wolcott's face was white as death.

"It is worse than I thought," he groaned.

"But you *would* know," Hugh said, half apologetically. "However, there was no harm done, only in intention. The harm came afterwards. Dane, who was a boy of scarcely twenty, had long been bewitched with her handsome face, though he knew she loved Walter. But after Walter was married she put herself in Dane's way, giving him such little encouragements as only a woman knows how to do, and he caught flame at once, and in two months they were married; and though the old squire was terribly angry with Walter for marrying poor, she got round him, somehow, so that he found no fault with Dane for doing the same thing, but left him his entire property and turned Mr. Walter off with a miserable hundred dollars! There, you have got the whole story, and if it is rather hard on her, remember it was your own asking." And he bent steadily to the oars, and did not speak again until they rounded the point at the landing.

"If I only knew!" Leslie said, looking back with a perplexed, troubled face.

"Did you speak to me, sir?" Hugh asked, looking up.

"No; it's nothing that you could tell me. Perhaps it's only one of my fancies—I hope so, God knows!" shuddering, and shutting his eyes to the long line of black, jagged rocks just discernible beneath the surface of the water.

Doctor Dinsmore coming back from Marbleheath found Lena looking brighter and happier than she had for a long time. He was greatly pleased, for though he had said nothing, he had watched the pretty face he loved so well more closely than she thought, and noted the listless look, and the unnatural calmness it wore sometimes. He had an impression that her liver wasn't just right—nobody's hardly *is*—that being a pet disease with most physicians, or most patients, I don't know exactly which—but he knew besides that she needed more company and more change. It was impossible for him to be at home much, with his practice, and so he encouraged her going to Mrs. Hargrave's often, urging her when she seemed reluctant, or coming round in his carriage and taking Mrs. Hargrave home with him, if he could not prevail on Lena to go out. After Leslie Wolcott came back he still continued the practice, and was delighted to see the roses coming back to her cheek, and the brightness to her eye. Sometimes, when Mrs. Hargrave was engaged, Leslie came alone; indeed, after a few weeks he came mostly alone, and the doctor congratulated himself on securing such a charming companion for Lena in his absence, and felt very grateful towards him for devoting a portion of his time to relieving the tedium of the long, dull days at the old house.

As far as Lena was concerned, she only knew that she was strangely exalted. She felt half the time as if she was out of the body, sailing through some superior air. She was never conscious of feeling lonely and nervous now, only a little restless sometimes, when *he* did not come. She was better acquainted with his moods, and when the winds and storms were out, she did not expect him; but she grew to watching for him as he paced back and forth in the long drive, walking off the excitement induced by the elemental strife, with an almost irresistible desire to fly to him. She got the idea into her mind that if she could sit by him, and touch his pulses, she could calm them. A feeling of pity for his strange impressibility sprang up in her heart, and unconsciously her manner towards him grew gentler and tenderer. And yet, all of this time she had never thought of him other than a brother. She was conscious of a vague feeling of unrest—sometimes of exhaustion—during his absence, but she was too innocent in intent to attribute it to anything save the natural pleasure resulting from intercourse with a congenial mind.

There was no disputing the fact that Leslie Wolcott was a fascinating companion. There was something about his fine, sensitive nature that affected one like rare, old wine—it was

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stimulating and exhilarating, and stirred all the subtiler chords of the soul. This was the first influence which his presence exerted over Lena, and if it grew daily stronger and deeper, she was still unconscious of it.

Doctor Dinsmore was undoubtedly a very wise man, after his way. He never failed in the accurateness of his diagnosis, and he could scent a fever as far as any one, and treat it as skillfully, too. He was the most careful and wary of men against the insidious approach of any and all diseases, and yet he made a sad and fatal mistake, when, seeing that his young wife was provided with an agreeable companion, he gradually withdrew himself from her society, and devoted his leisure hours to studying acute diseases, and periodic epidemics, with their possible remote causes, and left a more fearful and insidious disease to develop itself in his own home unmolested.

But this was the one weak point in Doctor Dinsmore's character. He had the most perfect faith in those he loved; not that jealousy and distrust are virtues, but he had a sort of unacknowledged theory that *his* idols were perfect, and out of his own strong, true heart he invested them with all beauty, and all strength, and all perfectness.

The first feeling of uneasiness that Lena experienced, was a vague consciousness—whether born out of a fear of her own weakness, I do not know—of feeling afraid, or rather in awe of her husband. She wished—still vaguely—that he was not quite so grave, and wise, and good. And, with a little regretful pain, that she tried to stifle, not *quite* so old. Not that she ever thought of him as looking old—only as she fancied that it was that, added to his wisdom and knowledge, that made him so grave and quiet always. I do not think, up to this time, that she was conscious how strong an interest had grown up in her heart for Leslie Wolcott, or how often she wished that her husband had just a little of his ease and grace of manner, and adaptability to social life. But there came a day of revealment—one of those little chances that turn the bolts of fate.

She had been to the Bluff spending the day. The doctor had taken her up in the morning in his chaise, and was to come for her in the evening. Late in the afternoon he was called away, however, and had only time to ride up and ask Wolcott if he would so far oblige him as to take a boat and go over after his wife, as he should not probably reach home much before midnight.

Mollie Sterne had not outgrown her olden theory about Wolcott, and more than ever that night did she feel the strange presentiment, as she looked in the bright, glowing face, touched with that strange, supernatural beauty that came into it at times, lending it an indescribable fascination. Even she was not wholly insensible to the attraction of the dark, dreamy face, with the tender, melting lips, and great bewildering eyes. She stood in the door watching them as they faded away in the mist and darkness, and her dream of the enchanted forest came into her mind. She tried to put it away, but still it lingered persistently.

A soft calm had fallen over the little boat, and only the light flash of the oars stirred the silence. A dreamy content filled their hearts—a perfect rest. They took no note of time, or space, or would, had not the boat come suddenly and sharply in collision with a low, sunken reef, near the shore, but much below the usual landing-place.

Lena gave a quick spring, the boat made a sudden lurch and she went over into the water. It was not deep, however, and before she had hardly time to think, Leslie had taken her out and was holding her to his heart in a wild, passionate embrace. There was not a word spoken by either, but whole volumes could not have made the revelation to each. She felt dizzy and sick, and a swift wish came into her heart, that she had lain there under the sea, and never known her own sin, and weakness, and misery. She stood by the shore while he waded in and drew up the boat, and then without a word they walked towards the house.

"Will you come in?" she said, when they reached the door, yet in a tone that said "do not."

"Not to-night," reaching out his hand as he turned to go.

She touched it with trembling fingers—it was cold as any ice and yet its touch sent a swift, subtile fire through her veins.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. HARGRAVE sat sewing by her little round table, and waiting Leslie's return. She did not really like the thought of his going; but Doctor Dinsmore had asked him, and she knew of no excuse to make. She had felt a slight uneasiness lately about this growing intimacy. Leslie acted strangely, too. She only feared for him; *she* was safe, of course,

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in her husband's love. But she did not like to have Leslie look at Lena Dinsmore with that look on his face she had seen once or twice, and which once, long ago, when it would have been no sin, she had warned him against. She was thinking it over when the door opened, almost noiselessly, and Leslie came in, looking so white and haggard that she gave a faint scream, impressed for the instant that it was his wraith.

"In mercy's name, Leslie, what is the matter?" springing to her feet as he came towards her.

"Hush, Celia! there is no cause for alarm," he said, his teeth chattering.

"Why, Leslie, you are enough to frighten one! How pale you are! and," putting her hand on his arm, "you are wringing wet, too. Were you capsized? and, O Leslie, where is Lena? She isn't—" pausing in sudden terror at her own thoughts.

"No, she is at her own house. I was careless, I suppose, and the boat run against a rock. She was alarmed and sprang up, giving the boat a lurch which carried her over into the water. It was close in shore, and so of course she wasn't drowned. Can I take this light?" he asked, abruptly.

"Certainly. But how came you so wet? Did you have to help her out? but of course you did."

"I waded in to push the boat ashore," was the evasive answer.

Mrs. Hargrave brightened up the fire—for, though it was June, the evening had been chill—and sat down to wait for Leslie's reappearance. She had fully made up her mind to speak to him about his evident interest in Lena Dinsmore. She thought it her duty to, and, as unpleasant as it was, she had resolved to do it, hoping, indeed, that her fears were unfounded.

He came in presently, his face still wearing that white, strange look that she never saw in it but once before—the day he had received that letter from Agnes Carroll, recalling him to Baltimore. She sat a few moments watching him in silence. Her gaze drew his, and he looked up.

"What?" seeing the question in her face.

"You will not be angry, Leslie?"

"Angry?"

"Yes, angry! for I'm going to say something that may be unpleasant. I think it my duty to speak to you, on your own account, and—and hers. I feel it the more because I first urged you to go; but I never dreamed—O Leslie, in Heaven's name, tell me that I shall not have cause to regret it!" she said, passionately.

He did not speak or move, save to turn his face a little more in shadow.

"Leslie," speaking sharp and quick, "tell me that you do not care for Lena Dinsmore more than other women!" She was leaning forward, her breath coming short and quick.

He lifted his face from the shadow and turned it towards her.

"Shall I tell you a falsehood, Celia?" he said, steadily.

"O Leslie, Leslie, what are you thinking of? Why will you be so reckless as to involve us all in ruin? Why will you persist in loving her, of all women—"

"Celia," he interrupted, turning squarely upon her, his eyes flashing fiercely, "you do well to denounce me for loving this girl, you who loved her *father!*"

She grew white, and put up her hand as if to keep him away; but she did not deny it, or even question how he came by the knowledge, only saying, as if in extenuation:

"But *he* was not married, Leslie."

"And when he was, *your* love turned to hate; mine did not. There is the difference."

"It is false! I never ceased to love Walter Hargrave while he lived!" And then suddenly conscious of the terrible admission she had made, she leaned on the table and broke into passionate weeping.

He sat down beside her, soothing her as she had once soothed him. He touched her hair tenderly, and kissed her white, thin hand. At last he began to understand something of what her life had been all these years, and out of his own pain grew pitiful toward hers. But Lena Dinsmore's name was not mentioned again between them.

For a week Leslie fought down his desire to see Lena, but at the end of that time he yielded, and went up there. He had succeeded in persuading himself that he could handle coals and not be burned. He flattered himself that he was so much stronger than thousands of others, who have tried the same thing and *fell*, that he could go just so far and no farther; that he could stand on the brink and not go over into the dark abyss below, as they had done.

At first there was a little restraint between them—neither could quite forget. If the doctor was absent, Jane Davitt was summoned from the kitchen to sit with them; which fact she attributed to her own personal

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attractions, of which she had an average share, and strangely enough was not ignorant of the fact, as most young women are. She was not altogether insensible to the fascinations of Wolcott, and, as he talked to her more of late, some very bewildering ideas took possession of her brain.

Over and over Lena resolved never to see Leslie Wolcott again. Away from the influence of his presence she could make numberless resolutions, only to be broken at the first touch of his hand, or glance of his eye. She knew that she was helpless in his presence. Something of the feeling she had experienced the year before came over her at times. She grew weak and giddy sometimes; and then a memory of that terrible illness would come over her, and, stealing back, O such a long, long distance! came the memory of those sweet days of convalescence, and the memory of something sweeter still, that dawned on her, first faintly, and then growing imperceptibly stronger, until one evening—should she ever forget it?—it blossomed into a blessed certainty. But that was—O, so very long ago! It was little more than a memory now. Sometimes she almost fancied it was a dream, seeing the calm, studious face of her husband, that, though always kind and gentle, was always grave and quiet also. She began to think that rare smile which dawned in his face, and which had changed it so marvellously, was all a chimera of her distempered imagination; and perhaps the "O my darling! my love!" whose memory thrilled her even now, was nothing more. He never said it now—he never smiled at her in that way now.

And so, when she grew listless and the roses burned fitfully in her cheeks, if he had taken her in his arms and said, "Lena, I love you, my pretty darling," it would have had a very different effect from the nauseous tonics he did administer. But it never entered his wise brain that a woman ever needed any such medicine as that.

And so, while she grew weaker to resist, and the danger grew nearer and nearer, he whose place it was to shield and keep her from temptation, by reason of his strength and her weakness, was blind and insensible to the fearful peril that surrounded her, and stood by with quiet, impassive face, while fate was luring her weak feet to destruction. And, though I would not excuse or seek to palliate *her* error, I ask, was he wholly blameless?

The summer was unusually unhealthy in Brent that season, and, as it neared midsummer, Doctor Dinsmore was almost constantly away from home. He was one of those physicians who always took a personal interest in his patients, and even the few hours he was at home his mind was preoccupied with care for them, and the preparing of special remedies for special cases. Leslie Wolcott had, by great self-denial, abstained from visiting at the doctor's with his olden freedom. He knew, when he thought about it, that he ought to leave Brent immediately. But what could he do? He had promised his sister to stay, and he had nowhere else to go, really.

Never since *that* night had he been alone with Lena. But one night—it was one of those rare July nights, when the world is so fair that the "golden streets and crystal sea" cannot allure one's thoughts from the splendor and glory of this beautiful earth—bewildered and intoxicated by the dewy airs and faint, sweet odors, his feet quite unconsciously took the direction of his heart, and stopped where that stopped, before an open door with a white, fair face gleaming through the starlight.

The great elms drooped low over the roof, and the wind stirred the leaves with a low, murmurous sound. Away in the distance the sea glimmered like molten silver, and here and there through the village lights shone softly out through open windows and doors. A pensive whippoorwill came and perched in the branches of a neighboring tree, and poured out its sweet, tender song. For the first time since that night, Leslie Wolcott and Lena Dinsmore were alone. Even Jane Davitt was absent, some of her folks being sick. Indeed, sickness of some sort was chronic at the Davitts. Some of them were perpetually "ailin'," to use Mrs. Davitt's expression; but as there was an indefinite number of them, it didn't come so hard, for they could take turns, and it took it some time to get round. Perhaps if Jane had known that Wolcott would come, she might not have gone, under the impression that he would be disappointed. But she did not know, and so she tarried, and, as she tarried, fate wove her tangled threads in and out through the quivering leaves, brocading the dark pattern with shimmering stars, and saturating it through and through with languorous odors.

Lena would have fled from the danger, but the dreamy, languorous air held her like a

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spell. Besides, his hand touched hers—not cold and trembling now, but warm, soft and clinging—and his face looked up in hers, not pale, and sad, and haggard, but burning and glowing with uncontrollable, irresistible passion. She tried to look away, but he drew her eyes to his by that strange magnetic power, with which his whole organism was so heavily charged. She *could not* resist—he drew and held her in spite of herself. She struggled against the subtile influence until she trembled in every limb, and still she felt herself slipping—slipping. By-and-by his voice, low, tender, imploring, trembled on the air, and fell into the sweet silence, like the murmur of the leaves, and the soft song of the whippoorwill:

"O Lena! my love, my life, my soul!"

He opened his arms—she made one last effort—trembled and fluttered like a charmed bird—and then, faint and dizzy, fell forward against his bosom. His arms closed her in, and his lips pressed hers once, twice, thrice, with passionate fervor. Then suddenly, as if imbued with some mysterious strength, she threw off his encircling arms, sprang into the hall, and ran like a frightened hare up the long stairway, and into her own room, and slipping the bolt, fell across the bed in a swoon.

Two hours after Doctor Dinsmore took hold of the door and found it still fast. Twice he called, "Lena, Lena," before it was opened.

"What, afraid, little coward?" he said, looking at her through the dusk. Then added, "I think when you come up stairs, Lena, it will be best to close the outer doors. I found the front door standing open to-night. Not that I am afraid of being robbed, only perhaps you would feel safer."

Safer! O, if he had only known the danger she had fled from! But he was very weary, and only once when he touched her hand did he feel at all uneasy. It was cold almost as a dead hand.

"Did you take those powders I left you this morning?" he inquired, with rather more than his usual professional anxiety.

"Yes," Lena said. very faintly.

"Strange," he muttered. "I shall have to make you up something else. It wont do to have you sick again this summer." And his mind went back to the marble face among the pillows that he had never expected to see smile on him again. "My little darling!" he said softly to himself, his heart growing tender with the memory.

Ah, if only he had said it to her! If only he had taken her to his strong heart, and wooed her once more with loving words, how much of all the pain and anguish of the future might have been spared him! But he had rode all day and was very tired, and so he quickly fell asleep, while she tossed restlessly upon her pillows, never closing her eyes until the dawn reddened in the east.

When she went down the next morning, he had gone off for the day, and Jane said, with a sad face:

"I expect I have got to go home, Mrs. Dinsmore. Two of the little boys are down with the measles, and the baby has got the cholera infantum, and Marcia—she's next to me—has sprained her ankle so that she can't take a step, and mother is almost distracted with the neuralgia."

Lena's heart stood still with apprehension. Was she to be left utterly alone with her temptation? But under such an accumulation of diseases, what could she say, but tell her to hasten home at once to her afflicted kindred? And so she went, and she was left alone—alone with her thoughts, with such a silence in the great house all day, that she grew almost distracted with its voiceless presence.

The doctor came home early that night. He was vexed that Jane had gone, and started out to find some one to take her place; but there was so much sickness about just then, that it was impossible to find any one that could come.

"I am so sorry," he said. "I hate to leave you alone here so much, but I don't see as we can do any better than to wait for those Davitts to get well. I don't think I ever saw people that so thoroughly enjoyed being sick as they do; they always manage to have something!" in a vexed tone.

The next morning he came in with a beaming face.

"Lena," he said, "I've just seen Wolcott on the street, and asked him as a special favor to run in and sit with you days while Jane was away."

"Is he coming?" she asked, feeling herself growing white.

"Yes; so you can read and sing, and be just as happy as you can till I come back. I'll try to come early—maybe I'll be home to dinner. I shall feel better about you now I know you wont be alone all day. He hesitated a little, I thought, about coming, but I persuaded him. I should have gone after

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Mrs. Hargrave, but she hasn't set up any this two days, I understand."

Lena came up and put her hand timidly on his shoulder.

"I wish you hadn't. O Basil, I wish you would take me with you!" she said, vehemently, bursting into tears.

"Nonsense! Why, child, you would get all manner of diseases!"

"I don't care—only let me go! O Basil, do take me away from here!"

He unclasped her hands from his arm, and lifted her gently from her feet and set her in a chair, very much as one would a little child.

"You really must *try to control* your nerves better," he said. "By-and-by I shall have another patient on my hands, and I have more than I know what to do with now. There," smoothing down her hair with his cool, firm fingers, "be a good, brave little girl."

The sobs died away in her throat, and a gentle quiet diffused itself through her system. It came to her to tell him all—all her weakness and temptation, and implore him to save her from herself—and from *him*. But just then there was a rap at the door; some one had come for the doctor, and he went out, and did not come in again; and so the golden moment was lost.

One after another the long summer days went by, each one drawing closer and closer the web of a terrible fate about poor Lena. She had almost ceased to struggle now, or grow white or faint at the loving words and sweet caresses that grew more frequent and more intoxicating. She seemed to herself to be incapable of will or resistance; a sort of soft delirium enfolded her, enchaining her senses. The touch of his hand, the glance of his eye, sent an indescribable rapture through every fibre of her being. Her eyes grew brilliant and dreamy by turns, and a fitful red burned in her cheeks.

Doctor Dinsmore came home one day quite early. As he entered the hall, he heard Wolcott's voice reading, a poem, he thought. He slipped quietly up the stairs to his office. It was just the opportunity he wanted. There was a very strange and complicated case over at Swansdown, that had defied the skill of the resident physicians, and he had been called in that day. He had an impression that a case almost exactly coincident was described in one of his medical books, and he had hastened home to search it out.

But careful as he had been Lena had heard his step, and a sudden fear that he might be ill startled her from the subtile enchantment which the dreamy day, the languorous airs and the passionate poem had all combined, with the irresistible charm of *his* presence, to enthrall her. Moreover, the simple presence of her husband in the house infused a momentary strength to her will, and, hastily excusing herself, she ran lightly up the stairs, the sudden fear bringing back something of the olden longing for his love, which she remembered still, though as something that had happened such a weary, weary time ago; and there had so much come between!

But the memory, far away and indistinct as it seemed, softened her heart towards him, clearing away, for a moment, the unhealthy mist that enveloped her. It was not too late now, she thought, her heart throbbing quickly. She would make one more effort; if that failed —ah, then!

She opened the door softly, a faint, shy flush on her cheek. He looked up, the faintest shadow of annoyance crossing his face. He had just got a slight trace of the case he was in search of, and his whole heart was in his profession just then.

"Well, what?" He did not mean to speak irritably, but he did.

The flush died out of her cheek, and the tender smile from her lips, but she came forward slowly and timidly, and slipped down on a cushion at his feet.

"I feared you were ill, Basil," she said, laying her hand timorously on his knee.

He moved a little—still unthinkingly—and her hand fell away; it interfered with the leaves of the book he was turning. She sat in silence a little while, the memory of his love seeming further and further away, and more and more unreal. Perhaps it was all a phantasy of her imagination, after all; or, *maybe, it was sympathy and pity for her* loneliness and poverty, and never love at all. She had an impression that love was demonstrative. And then she remembered the tender, pet names her father used to call her, and the kisses and caresses he had lavished so unceasingly upon her. O never, even in all those first terrible days of her bereavement, had she felt more bitterly orphaned than now! Even old Hugh, rough and hard as he was, called her "his Pretty," and "his Blossom." And then there came over her thoughts the bewildering wealth and lavishness of *his tenderness*, and though her eyes

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drooped and her cheek crimsoned at the remembrance, her heart yearned for the light, and warmth, and tenderness of love; and the grave reticence and impassive calmness of the man before her, absorbed in his medical researches, struck a heavy chill to her heart. The last hope seemed slipping from her weak grasp, but she said, faintly:

"Basil, I want to tell you something. I—"

"Don't interrupt me now, Lena," he said, looking up quickly, his finger resting on the leaf he was reading. "I hoped you wouldn't hear me;" this last in a slightly impatient tone. You see the case was very intricate and complicated, and his professional ardor was all aglow, and he *could* not be interrupted.

She arose and walked out of the room with a slow, unsteady step. An hour afterwards Doctor Dinsmore put his face into the door:

"I am going over to Swansdown, Lena, so you needn't get any supper on my account. Don't sit up for me; I may not be back till quite late. There is rather an unusual case over there, which has been puzzling the doctors some time. I have discovered a description of the disease in an old medical work, together with a plan of treatment, and I am anxious to lose no time in putting it in operation; for the case is an extremely critical one. Take one of those Dover powders if you get too nervous; but it would be better not to *be* nervous." And he hurried out, too absorbed in the possible result of his experiment to notice the white despair in her face.

The sun crept down the west and vanished out of sight; the twilight came softly and crept in at the open windows, and still Lena sat where he had left her. There were traces of tears on her cheek, and her eyelids were still heavy with them; but the force of her grief had spent itself, and only now and then a long, quivering sob stirred her bosom. She did not hear any one come in, but she was conscious all at once of *his* presence. Her heart gave a throb of mingled fear and gladness. He stood just within the door, looking at her.

"I came over for the doctor," he said. "Celia is not feeling as well to-night."

"He has gone to Swansdown," she said, simply.

But his quick ear detected the sound of tears in her voice. He came and stood opposite her at the window. The pale moonlight fell over her rich, tremulous curls, and across her lap, where her white, clasped hands were lying. He made a motion towards her, but restrained himself with a powerful effort.

"What is it?" he said, in a low, compelling voice.

"I wish that I were dead! O Leslie, if only you had let me lie there under the sea that night!" she moaned.

"Perhaps it would have been better if we both were lying there," he said, gloomily, still holding himself away. "Only that you have another, stronger love than mine to hold you—"

"O Leslie, I think I have been mistaken all these years," she interrupted, sadly. "You know I was poor, and *he* knew it. I was weak and ill, also, and he pitied me and married me."

"And I—O my darling, I love you! Better than life, better than anything in earth or heaven, better than my own soul!" he exclaimed, fiercely, springing to her side, and holding her trembling hands in his burning clasp. "O Lena, you are dying here in this cold and chill! Come away with me, love—away somewhere, where we can forget all the old, dark past!"

"But, O Leslie, it is wrong, sinful! You must not—"

"Then why, if it is wrong, is every thought, and wish, and desire of my soul attracted so irresistibly towards you?" he demanded, fiercely. "I have struggled against it, God knows, but I cannot resist the mysterious influence. You draw and hold me, and I *cannot* resist. I swear to you, Lena, that it is no sensual love that I bear you, but the finest and rarest devotion of my soul—the purest passion of my life. From the first moment I ever saw you, I have been conscious of this subtile, inexplainable attraction. You seem, somehow, a necessity of my nature—a part of my own life. O darling, let me have my own!" he implored, drawing her irresistingly to his arms.

She felt weak and giddy, and her senses were in a whirl. *Here* at least was love, tenderness and devotion—and she was so hungry for love! Should she starve for it all her *life* when it was offered her in such lavishness? Should she beg for it as she had done, and get nothing—nothing but *kindness?* And the memory of that afternoon came back to her, and, with a little shiver, she crept closer to the heart whose love she *knew* and *felt* in every nerve, and vein, and sinew.

"I know it is wrong, Leslie," she said, faintly; "but, God forgive me, I cannot help it!"

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